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How Cultural Factors Hastened the Population Decline of the Powhatan Indians

Julia Ruth Beckley

Virginia Commonwealth University

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HOW CULTURAL FACTORS HASTENED THE POPULATION DECLINE OF THE
POWHATAN INDIANS (1607-1699)

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of
Arts in History at Virginia Commonwealth University.

by

JULIA RUTH BECKLEY

Master of Arts in History, Virginia Commonwealth University, 2008
Bachelor of Arts in History, Christopher Newport University, 2003

Director: DR. SARAH MEACHAM
PROFESSOR OF HISTORY, DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY

Director: DR. JOHN KNEEBONE
PROFESSOR OF HISTORY, DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY

Director: DR. JOSHUA ECKHARDT
PROFESSOR OF ENGLISH, DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH

Virginia Commonwealth University
Richmond, Virginia
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Introduction

The Powhatan Indians once dominated the Virginia population. When the English settled permanently in North America, however, the Powhatan population dwindled to near extinction in a period of less than one hundred years. In 1607, the date when the English attempted to gain a foothold in America for the third time, over 14,000 Powhatan Indians inhabited Virginia. A century before, there were likely 20,000.¹ By the year 1700, fewer than 1,200 remained.² Native Virginians knew a great deal more about survival in the Tidewater area than the English did. They could have easily wiped out any European population that arrived in Virginia. Nevertheless, the result of Anglo-Powhatan contact was Powhatan decimation and English prosperity. Many historians attribute the expediency of the Powhatan decimation to English weaponry and the spread of germs, but English and Powhatan cultural factors also expedited the decimation. The English cultural factors included tendencies to

¹ Turner, E., Randolph, "A New Population Estimate for the Powhatan Chiefdom of the Coastal Plain of Virginia", *Quarterly Bulletin of the Archeological Society of Virginia* 28: 57-65, 1973.

² Speck, Frank G., "Chapters on the Ethnology of the Powhatan Tribes of Virginia", *Indian Notes and Monographs* 1:5, (Museum of the American Indian, Heye Foundation, 1928) in ref. to 1705 Beverly Census.

conquer and practices of cultural superiority. The Powhatan cultural factors included vacillating contact policy (from diplomacy to hostility) and a tradition of Powhatan kindness.

As the common narrative explains, Europeans destroyed masses of Native American tribes with common cultural decimation causes--advanced weaponry and incurable disease epidemics. The process began in 1492 when Columbus landed in San Salvador. Columbus arrived as the first European to reach the New World for purposes of exploration and permanent colonization. The European germs carried to the New World caused high mortality for the Native Americans. The natives' lack of immunity exacerbated any sickness created by European germs. By the time the Europeans lost the desire to cooperate, weakened Native Americans could not resist the inevitable conquest of their way of life. Additionally, European firearms caused high mortality in Native American populations because the Indians did not possess comparable weaponry in battle. Historians believe that advanced European firearms and strange germs were the two common causes of Native American decimation.

In addition, however, English and Powhatan cultural traditions expedited the Powhatan decimation. The English settlers at Jamestown tended to believe in their own cultural superiority.

These cultural factors evolved from generations of war and nobility. The Powhatans, in contrast, vacillated their contact policy from diplomacy to hostility. They also valued kindness. These contrasting cultural factors served as major causes of expedient Powhatan decimation beyond the usual explanations of guns and germs. This thesis will explore cultural factors and examine their role in Powhatan decimation. Ironically, many of the Powhatan cultural traditions that exposed them to conquest are today recognized as the inherent values of the American ethos—diplomacy that shifts from peaceful to hostile in order to maintain freedom, and kindness.

The Powhatans, like many other Native American groups, celebrated traditions of storytelling and dream interpretation, both of which made them vulnerable to decimation.³ In Aztec culture of Mexico, those spiritual interpretations predicted the arrival of newcomers from the east. The Powhatans practiced vision-quests, or *huskanaws* that also foretold the coming of the English. This time the vision allowed Chief Powhatan to stand ready without fear when the English first arrived to Jamestown.⁴ When the English

³ Diamond, Jared, *Guns, Germs, and Steel: The Fates of Human Societies*. (Norton W.W. Inc., 2005), 152.

⁴ Archer, Gabriel, *A Brief Description of the People*, (Public Records Office), in *Jamestown Narratives*, 126.

arrived, the Powhatans were both grateful and awestruck at the fulfilled prophecy and therefore vulnerable to psychological intimidation. Native dreams of a mythological beast with white wings approaching on the water from the east made them euphoric rather than suspicious when a white-sailed ship full of foreigners arrived. This euphoria and the subsequent actions it inspired made the Powhatan dream-interpreting culture vulnerable to conquest.

Additionally, the Powhatan Indians' traditions of kindness clashed with the English tendencies towards aggression; the clash caused the decimation of one culture and the dominance of another. The Powhatans lived in a weakened political state at the time of English contact. Chief Powhatan, trying to maintain control over the English, often vacillated from a policy of diplomacy to a policy of hostility. These traditions existed in Powhatan diplomacy, trade relations, and every-day minutia in the years before and after English contact.

Thesis Topic

This thesis explores the cultural causes that expedited Powhatan decimation, including English aggressive tendencies, English cultural superiority beliefs, and weak Powhatan diplomatic practices.

The expedient English decimation of the Powhatan Indians should be attributed not only to firearms and disease, but also to varying cultural factors. The Powhatan population dropped ninety-three percent in the two decades following the colonization of Jamestown. Traditions of kindness that facilitated relationships between the Powhatans and neighboring tribes only tempted the English to take advantage when survival became desperate. Traditions of nobility and class instilled English superiority among the Jamestown colonists. While the Powhatan Indians made efforts to be kind, the English had preconceived notions of converting and dominating the host culture.

The Powhatans suffered expedient decimation by germs, firearms and cultural factors. Though historians have explored parallel decimations in South American cultural contacts, little has been written about the cultural factors that expedited Powhatan decimation. This thesis explains the decimation in the following manner: First, English cultural traditions prior to Anglo-Powhatan

show the English tendencies towards aggression and beliefs in cultural superiority. Second, Powhatan cultural traditions prior to Anglo-Powhatan contact show traditions of kindness and weak diplomatic practices. Third, the early years of Anglo-Powhatan contact show the veracity of how cultural factors expedited Powhatan decimation. The conclusion shows briefly how differences in archeological longevity expedited decimation.

English religious traditions corroborated the colonists' aggressive tendencies. The English had centuries-old traditions of strict biblical interpretation that existed as a commingling of church and state. Many historians follow the lead of Edmund Morgan who believed that Virginia's colonizers were not religious.⁵ Newer research shows that the early settlers to Virginia were. English colonists in Jamestown lived by the strict religious guidelines that punished church absence severely. The very charter that commissioned the first Jamestown colonists asserted a Christian religious dominance over any other spiritual lifestyle.⁶ As modern visitors to Historic Jamestown National Park are reminded by the inscription on the 100-foot obelisk (erected in 1907 to celebrate the

⁵ Morgan, Edmund S., *American Slavery, American Freedom*, (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1975).

⁶ Flaherty, David H., ed., *For the Colony in Virginia Britannia, Lawes Divine, Morall, and Martiall, etc.*, (Virginia: 1611).

tri-centennial anniversary of the English arrival to Jamestown) from the Instructions for Virginia to the Colony, 1606: “Lastly and chiefly, make yourselves all of one mind, for the good of your country, and your own, and to serve and fear God, the Giver of all goodness, for every plantation which our heavenly Father hath not planted shall be rooted out.”⁷ The phrase “make yourselves all of one mind” is the first evidence that the decimation of the Powhatans was not just based on guns and germs, but the idea that the English culture should dominate. The phrase “every plantation which our heavenly Father hath not planted shall be rooted out” evidences anti-Indian goals in the English that later charters confirmed.⁸

The English strict adherence to religious law and rigid interpretation of the *Holy Bible* differed vastly from the Powhatan traditions of spirituality. The Native Americans based their spirituality on animism and interpretation of visions. Young men went through coming-of-age rituals that brought them closer to the great spirits. The Powhatan Indians interpreted visions and dreams to predict future wars, weather, and leaders. The Powhatans did not

⁷ Virginia Company of London, *Instructions Given by Way of Advice, By Us Whom It Hath Pleased, the King's Majesty to Appoint of the Council for the Intended Voyage to Virginia, to be Observed by Those Captains and Company Which are Sent at this Present to Plant There*, (England, 1606).

⁸ Personal photograph, Jamestown tricentennial monument, April 16, 2007.

follow a written religious reference as the English did, but instead relied on vision disclosure from spiritual leaders within the tribe.⁹ The English asserted a goal of aggressive conversion of the Powhatans, both in official charters and private instructions. This would ultimately require intimidation tactics. Powhatan traditions prevented attempts to convert the English in any fashion, thus placing the Powhatans in a position of vulnerability.

The English arrived in Jamestown not only with a determination to convert anyone not of the Christian faith, but with a belief in their own cultural superiority. By 1607, English diplomacy reached a point where cultural conquest was the necessary choice to ensure economic health. Prior to encountering the Powhatan Indians, English explorers caused catastrophic deaths in Wales (English conquest began in the 12th century and legalized in 1535) and Ireland (English king Henry VIII conquered Ireland in 1536). The economic pressure to colonize the Americas coupled with fierce competition from France, Spain, Portugal, and the Netherlands caused catastrophic conquest-fatalities in South America and the Caribbean. When the English arrived in Jamestown, a precedent for peaceful co-existence between the colonizer and the colonized *did not exist*. When contact occurred

⁹ Diamond, 150.

between the English and the Powhatans, therefore, positions of English aggression and Powhatan vulnerability already existed in the minds of the English.

While the English had a longstanding tradition of conquest, the Powhatans had traditions of hospitality and generosity. Though suspicious of the new English arrivals to Jamestown, the Powhatans still presented them with gifts and led them through motions of welcome.¹⁰ The Powhatans lived in a rickety political state in 1607 and through the early seventeenth century because they had just finished a rapid and difficult empire expansion. As a result, Chief Powhatan's leadership and policies towards the English vacillated between diplomacy and hostility.

Research

Though the Powhatan Indians themselves did not leave written records, the English recorded the events of contact between the two groups. Since the bias of English accounts has been well documented, they were compared with research of current Powhatan

¹⁰ Smith, John, *A True Relation of Such Occurrences and Accidents of Note as Hath Hap'ned in Virginia Since the First Planting of that Colony Which is Now Resident in the South Part thereof, till the Last Return from Thence*, (London: 1608), in *Jamestown Narratives*, 144.

culture, a standard anthropological research practice. Accounts of Powhatan religious and diplomatic culture are based on English diaries, including those of Gabriel Archer, Samuel Argall, Richard Crankanthorpe, George Percy, John Rolfe, John Smith, Wright Strachey, and Robert Whitaker. Historian Helen Rountree has researched the longevity and accuracy of these traditions. This thesis is based on the use of Rountree's work in Powhatan culture. Additionally, Lifestyles of Powhatan decedents were studied alongside the original English accounts to determine the religious and diplomatic cultural traditions of the Powhatan Indians.

English colonists' diaries, the *Laws Divine Moral and Martial*, the Virginia Company of London Instructions and Charters, and English exploration charters provide evidence about the religious and diplomatic cultural traditions of the Powhatan Indians

Lastly, archeological evidence shows the differences between the longevity of the English culture and the longevity of the Powhatan culture.

While many historians have examined the Anglo-Powhatan contact period, none has focused primarily on cultural factors for Powhatan decimation. Englishmen left the only written accounts of the contact period; the Powhatans did not write. John White and Theodor De Bry created pictures of Powhatan culture. Accounts of Powhatan Culture at

the time of English Contact at Jamestown come mostly from Henry Spelman, John Smith, and William Strachey. Cultural bias has been carefully considered. John Smith boasted to further his military career and reputation. William Strachey wrote most of the observations on women's lives, but believed in female submissiveness.

In modern times (1900-present), secondary sources explain the Powhatan culture in more depth. Helen Rountree's exploration of Powhatan culture in the last four hundred years is based on the interpretation of 17th century Jamestown narratives and modern-day accounts from tribal ancestors. In addition to Rountree, research came from works by Karen Kupperman, Alf Mapp, and Ivor Noel Hume to explain the shifting Anglo-Powhatan relationship in the seventeenth century. Lastly, several historians have examined exclusively the contact of European and American cultures (namely Frederic Gleach, Jared Diamond, and John E. Kicza.) Most of these works focus on areas other than eastern North America, but the works were utilized for general trends and comparable cultural norms.

English Cultural Factors that Hastened the Population Decline of the Powhatan Indians

In the century before the colonization of Jamestown, the English survived decades of war and refined centuries-old traditions of cultural superiority and nobility. Each of these factors instilled in the English tendencies to conquer other cultures. Though the motivations for settling North America are benignly classified as “God, Glory, and Gold,” conquering tendencies quickly blanketed all plans to evangelize, “spread the good of country,”¹¹ and propagate economic growth. These conquering tendencies manifested themselves in the early years of Anglo-Powhatan contact and facilitated expedient Powhatan decimation.

The common classification of English motivations for settling the New World is “the three G’s”: God, Glory, and Gold.

“God” summarizes the English colonists’ desire to spread Christian Protestantism to the Native Americans who lived in the New World. Past encounters with the Powhatans such as the 1595 Jesuit mission of Don Luis and the Roanoke colony led the English to believe that the Powhatans lived as heathens in need of religious conversion. The desire to evangelize

and spread the Christian faith is rooted Biblically for Protestants.

Commands to evangelize are found in many passages of the Bible, including Matthew 28:19-20: “. . .Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”¹²

According to this command, Protestants should follow Christian principles (the foremost being to love thy neighbor) and set examples as disciples for Christ. Also among Christian principles is the commandment to serve, help, and demonstrate kindness.

Though the desire to evangelize seems benign, later explanation will unveil the undercurrents of conquest in the first “G”.

The second “G” in the series is Glory, which ties in nicely to God. Though peace instilled when James I of England rose to power in 1603, the English and Spanish competed fiercely for North American colonization. Beginning with the 1494 Treaty of Tordesillas, Spanish leaders sought to claim virtually all of North America, from the tip of Florida to the St. Lawrence River. In 1531, Bristol merchant Robert Thorne urged King Henry VIII to seek a northern route to Asia. Following

¹¹ Virginia Company of London, *Instructions Given By Way of Advice*.

¹² *The Holy Bible*, New International Version, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1986), 1077

his voyage, the coastline of the Chesapeake Bay became a haven for English privateers, protecting Jamestown from the spread of Spanish influence. In 1585, the English attempted permanent colonization of Roanoke, but failed. By 1607, they were eager to try again to win a portion of the New World and claim the land for England.¹³ The English had to work hastily in order to settle the New World before the Spanish. The English paid little mind to the survival of the culture that already inhabited North America—it was more important that the Spanish did not have a chance to lay claim to the land.

The third “G” in the series is Gold. Many Englishmen believed that Virginia held great economic potential. In 1605, Captain George Weymouth visited New England, and noted its abundant natural resources. He returned to his homeland to encourage the idea of profit venturing in the New World. On April 6, 1606, the English crown issued a charter to the Virginia Company, a joint-stock corporation headed by royal appointees. The charter stated that Company officials would define the structure of government within the region to be colonized. Two companies emerged: the Virginia Company of Plymouth, which was to explore and colonize in New England, and the Virginia Company of London, which was to settle between 34 and 41 degrees north latitude. The Virginia Company

¹³ McCartney, Martha W, *Jamestown, An American Legacy*, (Hong Kong: Eastern National, 2001), 4.

of London planned to reap large profits from the exportation of animal hides, medicines, minerals, and gold.¹⁴ They also hoped to make full use of the region's natural resources, by manufacturing glass, iron, potash, pitch, and tar.¹⁵

Under the reign of Elizabeth I (1559-1603), England worshipped under moderate Protestantism. In April 1559, the restored Act of Supremacy separated the Catholic Church from English politics. Queen Elizabeth disliked Protestant extremists such as the Puritans, who wanted to cleanse England of any remaining Catholic elements, so moderate Protestantism became the only legal religion. English bishops and anyone with a university degree had to take the Oath of Supremacy, recognizing the Queen as the head of the Church of England. Elizabeth dismissed any bishop that refused to take the oath. Most English accepted the new religion, but some Catholics continued to practice their religion in secret. Anyone not attending church faced fines and imprisonment.

English leaders forcefully quelled anti-Protestant actions when Mary Queen of Scots fled to England in 1568. Elizabeth held her prisoner for nineteen years because of a rebellion led by Catholics in northern England to murder Elizabeth and replace her with Mary Queen of Scots.

¹⁴ Haklyt, Richard. *Discourse of Western Planting*. (England, 1584),2.

¹⁵ McCartney, 7.

Elizabeth's guard violently quelled the uprising by February 1570 and executed most of the rebels. In the midst of the uprising, the pope issued a bill which ordered Elizabeth's excommunication and deposition.

Essentially, this meant that Elizabeth's Catholic subjects no longer had to obey her laws. In response, Elizabeth passed a law that stated that any subject denying Elizabeth as the lawful queen of England or naming Elizabeth as a heretic, schismatic, tyrant, usurper, or infidel, was guilty of treason. The fines for non-attendance at Church greatly increased and Catholic priests forcibly left England to avoid charges of treason.

With Protestantism intact in England, many devout English Catholics turned towards countries more amicable towards Catholicism. Thus, when the Spanish Armada (Spain being predominantly Catholic) under the command of Catholic Lord Howard of Effingham took to the seas, Catholics and Protestants quickly chose sides. All of this history shows that the English knew predominantly forceful and aggressive ways of spreading religion. The first motivation of the three g's was not a benign desire to evangelize Christianity, but a desire to spread Protestantism to beat Spain.

Like the Queen, the gentlemen of Jamestown wanted to spread not simply protestantism, but also the name of England. The language of the

instructions to the company and likely psychological stress provide evidence to show the aggressive tendencies of the English.

At first glance, the English motivation to spread Protestantism to the Powhatans seemed benign. Reverend Alexander Whitaker instructed the colonists to feel compassionate towards the Powhatans and save their souls:

Let the miserable condition of these naked slaves of the divell move you to compassion toward them. . . If this bee the life what think you shall become of them after death, but to be partakers with the divell and his angels for evermore. Wherefore you wealthy men of the world, whose bellies God hath filled with this hidden treasure, trust not in uncertain riches, neither cast your eyes upon them, for riches taketh to her wings as an eagle, and flieth into Heaven. But bee each in good works ready to distribute and communicate.¹⁶

But the English viewed the conversion of the Powhatans as a military necessity rather than the mere carrying out of religious commandments. Though the Spanish and the English lived at peace under James I, the tension between the two countries had hardly dissipated. The tension filtered into land competition in the Americas. Only decades earlier, the English emerged as the dominant European Protestant country of the Reformation while the Spanish maintained strong Catholic roots. Therefore, if conversion of the Native American population to the mother

¹⁶ Neil, Edward D., ed, *History of the Virginia Company of London with Letters to and From the First Colony Never Before Printed*, (Albany, New York: Joel Musell, 1869), 80.

country's official religion was successful, the instilment of culture would solidify a colonization-victory over the opposing country. Since the Jesuits had already introduced aspects of Catholicism to the Powhatans in Don Luis' encounter, the English likely felt pressured to override all other religious ideas with their own, just as they had learned under the rule of Elizabeth.

During the rule of Elizabeth I, England's foreign policy reflected the aggressive propagation of the name of Protestant England. The English aimed their aggression mostly at Catholic Spain.

The discussion of English aggression in the decades before Anglo-Powhatan contact begins at sea. John Hawkins started the English slave trade in 1562 by transporting slaves from Guinea to the West Indies. In 1568, Spaniards attacked Hawkins and his men in Mexico. In response, Hawkins and cousin Francis Drake led their men in an undeclared war against Spain. They worked as privateers and attacked Spanish ships transporting cargo across the Atlantic. Drake successfully served as a privateer. He stole gold and silver while Elizabeth turned a blind eye.

Meanwhile, the Spanish King held the Netherlands as a colony. The Dutch turned Protestant in 1568 and rebelled against the Catholic King's rule. Elizabeth sent an army to the Netherlands to defend her Protestant neighbors.

While England fought in the Netherlands, Phillip II of Spain planned to invade England. This plan dissipated when Francis Drake sailed into Cadiz harbour and destroyed most of the invading fleet while it was still in port. The Spanish continued preparations and set the Spanish Armada off in 1588. The Armada consisted of 132 ships and over 30,000 men. King Phillip II planned to send the Armada to Calais to meet a Spanish army grouped there, which would then travel to England and invade.

The Spanish armada failed, and all men taking part in combat at the time dealt with harsh conditions and gruesome sights. The armada arrived early to Calais and the Spanish troops there were not ready to embark. While the armada waited in the harbor, the English loaded “fire ships” with pitch and loaded guns which fired when the flames touched the gunpowder. The English then steered the fire ships towards the anchored Spanish ships. The armada broke formation and the English attacked. As the armada fled to the North, terrible storms wrecked many of the remaining ships. Meanwhile, the English did not lose a single ship.

Most of the original Jamestown colonists were veterans of Spanish wars and had learned aggressive conquering tendencies. Sir Thomas Gates fought with Sir Francis Drake to defeat the Spanish armada, continued the fight in the Netherlands, and brought with him his best friend in war, Captain Yeardley. Sir George Somers served as a commander in the West

Indies (victorious over both the Spanish and the Indians). Somers felt so strongly about the cause of Powhatan conversion that he left his seat in Parliament to come to Virginia. Richard Hakluyt served as a clergyman at Westminster and knew much of the practices of conversion. Edward Maria Wingfield was also a veteran of Spanish wars. Since the original religious leaders also had combat backgrounds, they likely used aggressive tactics to “convert” the Powhatans to Christianity.

Many psychologists have proven the effects of war on the human psyche. The pressures of military battle include: constant shifts in operational plans, unclear knowledge of enemy capabilities, malfunctions in equipment, and the requirement of combatants to face the threat of personal death or injury. These pressures, depending on the severity and duration, can cause acute stress disorder or post-traumatic stress disorder in military members.¹⁷

Veterans of war experience disappointment or resentment of the following conditions in the years or decades following battle, depending on severity and duration.¹⁸ The continuous psychological adaptation to war

¹⁷ Litz, Dr. Brett and Orsillo, Dr. Susan M, “The Returning Veteran of the Iraq War: Background Issues and Assessment Guidelines”, *Iraq War Clinician Guide*, Second Edition, (Walter Reed Army Medical Center: National Center for Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, 2004), 10

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 13

manifests over a lifespan. The result is an increased risk for depression, substance abuse, and aggressive behavior problems.¹⁹

Since most of the early religious leaders of Jamestown were veterans of war, their aggressive behavior manifested itself in the expedient decimation of the Powhatan Indians.

Aside from aggressive tendencies, other English cultural factors such as child-rearing tactics and gentlemanly conduct facilitated the expedient decimation of the Powhatan Indians.

The code of Powhatan politeness, explained later, was not understood nor shared by the English in Jamestown. In England, neighbors argued in the streets, about everything especially religion (the Powhatans, in contrast, were private about religion). When the English lectured the Powhatans about proper civilized life, the English assumed the Powhatans' silence was agreement, though the Powhatans actually viewed these lectures as rude. The English therefore did not understand the vacillation from quiet, polite listening to ferocious attacks.²⁰

While the Powhatans maintained traditions of teaching their children by example, the English raised their children differently. The

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 23-24

²⁰ Rountree, Helen and Turner, Randolph E., *Before and After Jamestown: Virginia's Powhatans and Their Predecessors*, (Miami: University of Florida Press, 2004), 123

English sent their children to other families to learn specific trades. This allowed the children to live as apprentices or servants in more families of higher class. Children could make social connections that would allow for upward mobility. In the same way, higher class English took in children of lesser families so that children could obtain a “better” education. The English held fast to ideas of class systems that would later manifest as cultural superiority over the Powhatans.

Another English cultural factor that facilitated expedient Powhatan decimation was the code of gentlemanly behavior. The long-standing cultural traditions of gentlemanly behavior instilled an innate superiority over the Powhatans in the original Jamestown colonists. By examining what it meant to be an English gentleman, one can see that the English were predisposed to “conquer” the Powhatans, even if such a notion was not often verbalized.

In Europe, status was based on the recognition of an inherent inequality in mankind. Gentlemen believed that some men were set apart with an inherited right to lead and rule while others had an inherited right to labor in humility. The upper class had responsibility for their inferiors and society as a whole, and in return received wealth and privilege. The lower classes contributed to society by working diligently in their specific vocations. As long as each understood his class and attended his duty, the

body politic was healthy.²¹ The gentlemen of Jamestown understood their class as higher than that of the Powhatans, a cultural factor that expedited Powhatan decimation by feeding English aggressive tendencies and expectations to rule.

In addition to aggressive tendencies brought on by years of war and instilled cultural superiority, the very charters that compelled the settlers contained language that drove them to conquer and decimate, if necessary. Within the context of the charters lies the English colonists' underlying intention to conquer the area. The aggressive language of the original instructions reads:

And finally that after the arrival of the said ship upon the coast of Virginia [and] the Counsellors' names published, the said Captain Newport shall with such number of men as shall be assigned him by the President and Counsel of the said Colony spend and bestow two months in discovery of such ports and rivers as can be found in that country, and shall give order for the present landing and furnishing of the two ships above named, and all such principal commodities and merchandize as can there be had and found, in such sort as he may return with the said ships full laden with good merchandizes, bringing with him full relation of all that hath passed in said voyage, by the end of May next if God permit.²²

²¹ Wright, Louis Booker, *The First Gentlemen of Virginia: Intellectual Qualities of the Early Colonial Ruling Class*, (San Marino, California: The Huntington Library, 1940), 6-7.

²² Neil, 8.

The instructions commanded the English to reap the resources of the land for the good of England alone, which shows the aggressive tendencies of the English.

The English maintained an aura of superiority towards native cultures prior to the settling of Jamestown. European superiority over American cultures grew prevalent both in North and South America. The superiority towards Powhatan cultures is apparent in the language of many of the initial charters of the Virginia Company of London. In the Advice for Landing, the company instructed the English to “choose a river that looks like it ventures far inland and pay no regard to the Indians that inhabit nearby.”²³

²³ *Ibid.*, 10.

Powhatan Cultural Factors that Shaped Behavior and Sometimes Expedited Powhatan Decimation

The Protohistoric period, in terms of Powhatan history, took place a century before contact at Jamestown. During this period, very few Europeans made contact. Since the Powhatans left only oral accounts, history from this time period is based on the interpretation of the written accounts of those Europeans who had contact with the Powhatans, and archeological data. The political state of the Powhatans made them vulnerable to conquest because they had expanded rapidly just before English arrival. The survival abilities of the Powhatans gave them a conquest advantage over the English, but the cultural traditions of the Powhatans including child-rearing, land usage, and gender roles, dwindled in the shadow of English aggressive tendencies.

During the Protohistoric period, “paramount” chiefs predominantly ran the Powhatan nation.²⁴ Each Algonquian-speaking district, or tribe, thrived under the rule of a district leader. Each district leader had subsidiary leaders in satellite locations. District chiefs followed the commands of the paramount chief.²⁵ The only exception to this way of life

²⁴ Rountree and Turner, 36

²⁵ Rountree and Turner, 36

occurred in the Chickahominy tribe. A council of leaders who ruled subsidiaries in satellite locations dominated the Chickahominies.

When Powhatan rose to power in the 1580s, the governance of Algonquian tribes in Virginia shifted rapidly and dramatically. According to Captain John Smith, Powhatan inherited his kingdom through a matrilineal system and originally led three tribes on the James River near Richmond and three tribes on the York River.²⁶ While Algonquian chiefs inherited their power matrilineally, they had to display their right to hold it through military action and might. Upon coming to power, Powhatan utilized military threat and intimidation tactics to add twenty-four districts (or tribes) onto the original six, expanding his area of control to the entire Virginia Coastal Plain of approximately 30,000 subjects.

William Strachey wrote about the intimidation tactics that Powhatan used in his rapid empire expansion. Around 1595, the Kecoughtan tribe lost their old chief. The old chief was uncooperative with Powhatan in the past and had maintained a strong military resistance against being conquered. When the new chief took power, Powhatan staged a raid on the town, kidnapped the women and children (and those men who survived the raid) and kept them in a central Powhatan location. According to Strachey, the account of Powhatan's attack on Piankatank was typical:

First, he sent divers of his men to lodge amongst them one night (pretending a general hunt), who were to give the alarm unto an abuscado of a greater company within the woods, who upon the sign given at the hour appointed, environed all the houses, and fell to the execution. Twenty-four men they killed (the rest escaping by fortune, and their swift footmanship), and the long hair of the one side of their heads, with the skin, cased off with shells or reeds, they brought away to Powhatan. They surprised also the women, and the children, and the werowance, all of whom they presented to Powhatan.²⁷

As peace-chief of his districts, Powhatan's people believed he had an increased ability to interpret dreams and spiritual will. This belief aided his abilities to take over other districts.

This Powhatan system of governance of many tribes through intimidating takeovers did not exist in other Native American cultures north of the Aztecs in Mexico at the time. Powhatan's decision to implement hostile expansion is a puzzle in history. Accounts show that Powhatan acted against the will of many Algonquian-speaking tribes. The most credible cause for Powhatan's rapid empire expansion was that he felt there was a threat against his inheritance. Powhatan's six districts were centrally located in an Algonquian nation full of many other strong

²⁶ Smith, *A True Relation*, 67.

²⁷ Strachey, William, *A True Reportory of the Wrack and Redemption of Sir Thomas Gates, knight, upon and from the Islands of the Bermudas; his coming to Virginia, and the estate of that colony then, and after under the government of the Lord La Warre. July 15, 1610*, In *Jamestown Narratives*, 213.

chiefs who may have posed a military threat had Powhatan not chosen to strike first.²⁸

Archeological evidence shows that many Virginia Algonquians chose to consolidate their groups after Powhatan's rapid expansion of power. Chiefs solidified alliances to create stronger military patterns. Many groups resisted Powhatan control even after he supposedly secured thirty districts.

The strongest piece of evidence suggesting that groups under Powhatan control maintained secret alliances is ceramic style. A change from shell-tempered pottery to ceramic style pottery of nearby areas occurred in three major areas around coastal Virginia, including the Potomac River basin, the area of the southern fall line, and southern Virginia to the Carolina sounds.²⁹

Other evidence exists in the remains of palisades surrounding specific Powhatan sites that were also known for resisting Powhatan control. Palisades features have been confirmed at Patawomeck, the Buck site on the Chickahominy River, near Flowerdew Hundred, at Appomatox, and in Great Neck. Each palisaded site is a place of military significance. The Flowerdew Hundred site possessed a strategic advantage because it served as a water route into the piedmont. The Patawomeck, Appomatox,

²⁸ Rountree and Turner, 39.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 22

and Great Neck sites contain ceramic evidence that suggest a military alliance. The Buck site is in Chickahominy territory—the Chickahominies successfully resisted Powhatan’s control for most of his reign.³⁰

By the time of English arrival, Powhatan’s empire had reached its peak, but his kingdom dilapidated from war. Powhatan did not have adequate time to secure the borders of his newly expanded kingdom, nor did he have time to instill just rule over obedient subjects. Rather, individual tribes allied to form stronger military patterns in order to resist further violent takeovers from within the empire. The Chickahominy tribe existed within the heart of Powhatan control, but managed to live under a different government with different leadership, never accepting Powhatan’s rule unconditionally.

English accounts indicate many Powhatan subjects disobeyed Chief Powhatan’s rule well into the settling of the Jamestown colony. Powhatan expressed his “love” for the colonists numerous times, and the English complained to him about attacks from his disobedient subjects.

Powhatan’s empire expanded rapidly before the English arrived. As a result, the Powhatan political state was weak and vulnerable to conquest. This factor facilitated their expedient decimation.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 46.

Two chiefs ran the Powhatan government: the peace chief, or internal chief (Powhatan), and the war chief, or external chief (Opechancanough). The peace chief held a higher-ranking position but still depended on the support of the war-chief in all matters. Powhatan made ultimate decisions over his people. Combined with the rapid expansion of the empire, the duality of chiefdoms created confusion as to whom should make diplomatic decisions after the English arrived, making the Powhatans vulnerable to an expedient decimation.

Native Virginians knew a great deal more about survival in the Tidewater area than the English did. With obvious advantage, why did the Powhatans not strike quickly and wipe out the English settlers before Powhatan decimation ensued? The answer lies in the comparison of Powhatan survival methodology and diplomacy. In many ways, the very way the Powhatans lived their lives before the establishment of Jamestown sealed their fateful decimation. The following section on Powhatan history and culture shows how the Indians had the survival advantage over the English in the New World.

Water was of great importance to the Powhatan culture and a major area of survival advantage over the English. Sixteenth-century eastern Virginia possessed an abundance of rivers, marches, and streams that served as transportation routes and sources of food for the

Powhatans. The Chesapeake Bay area received abundant precipitation. Powhatan priests performed rituals in attempts to raise or quell storms. Most Powhatan tribal territories surrounded either side of a major river or existed near tributaries that drained into estuaries.³¹

Theodor DeBry created engravings to show the creation of dugout canoes, an important piece of technology for the Powhatans.³² The canoes took a long time to create. The end product handled awkwardly on the water. The Powhatans used dugout canoes to secure fish, crabs, crayfish, mussels, oysters, clams, arrow arum berries, ducks, geese, beavers, otters, reeds, wild rice, muskrats, raccoons, turtles and other waterfowl.^{33,34}

Methods for water-use helped the Powhatans thrive for thousands of years, placing them at a survival advantage over the English in Tidewater.

The Powhatans had a method for land-use just as for water-use. The uplands (forest far from the waterways) remained wild for hunting and foraging. The Powhatans built houses near the waterways in order to take

³¹ DeBry, Theodor, Harriot, Thomas, ed., "Their manner of fishynge in Virginia", Engraving, *A Briefe and True Report of the New Found Land of Virginia: The 1590 Theodor de Bry Latin Edition*, (Charlottesville and London: University of Virginia Press, 2007), 67

³² *Ibid.*, "The Manner of Makinge Their Boates", 145

³³ Rountree and Turner, 83-84

³⁴ De Bry, "The Manner of Makinge Their Boates", 145

advantage of flooding. Powhatans could easily forage for natural resources that grew as areas flooded, such as barley, berries, and herbs.

The use of land had its share of danger for the Powhatans. In the early seventeenth century, the forests were rampant with bobcats, bears, rattlesnakes, copperheads, and packs of wolves. In this age before antibiotics, scratches from limbs could easily become infected. Powhatans utilized the uplands for firewood, cedar bark, deer, bear, turkeys, raccoons, opossums, turtles, pigeons, acorns, walnuts, hickory nuts, beechnuts, chestnuts, chinquapins, medicinal herbs, bloodroot, oak and elm bark, and saplings. Powhatans built houses in fields of barley, maypops, cordage plants, blackberries, raspberries, black cherry, grapes, hog peanuts, wild potatoes, cleavers, roses, briars, persimmon, sassafras, pines, and oaks.³⁵

The Powhatans did not have labor animals to help with agricultural chores, nor did they believe in any specific ownership of land. The chief served as land allocator, and he assigned individuals specific fields for the year. At the end of the harvest, the chief assigned new fields while the old ones went fallow. The land belonged to all with the chief serving as ultimate steward.³⁶

³⁵ Rountree and Turner, 85

³⁶ Rountree, Helen C., ed, *Powhatan Foreign Relations: 1500-1722*, (Charlottesville and London: University Press of Virginia, 1993)

The view and maintenance of land-ownership differed in the English mindset. The English viewed land as a commodity that ought to be possessed by individuals. The Powhatans freely allowed the English to inhabit Virginia soil. The English quickly expanded and pushed the Powhatans further and further from water and food sources. The Powhatan view of land ownership, or rather that land could not be owned, ultimately, facilitated expedient decimation.

Powhatan families made only what they needed to subsist—they gave any surplus as tribute to the chief or priests. Powhatan men and women learned to multitask in order to keep up with the time demands of manufacturing. Powhatan custom allowed for the entertaining of guests while working.

The Powhatans left home at major points in the year for food accumulation. Powhatans fished and hunted year-round, but more intensely in early spring (fishing) and late fall (hunting). Women ventured on serious nut-gathering expeditions in October and November. While men fished in early spring, women left to forage for wild plants. Powhatans did not live on domesticated plant foods year round.

The English had no knowledge of edible plant-life in the region and had to rely entirely on what the Powhatans chose to teach them. The Powhatans had the survival advantage over the English in tidewater, but

refrained from exploiting it. That restraint made them vulnerable to conquest.

Powhatan clothes took several days to make. Powhatans made clothing out of expensive deerskin, so they wore simple garments that didn't require much fabric. Children went nude. Women wore aprons. Men wore breechcloths. Powhatans smeared their bodies with paint made of animal fat to repel insects. When foraging, Powhatans donned leggings and moccasins to prevent scratches (which could cause infection, debilitation, or death if not cleaned). In order to avoid ruination, Powhatans removed clothing for other work.

Powhatans went to uncomfortable lengths to acclimate themselves not to feel cold except in very freezing conditions. They took baths daily in nearby waterways, even in cold weather. Blanket creation was expensive because it required multiple deerskins and weeks of work. Women chose to marry good hunters to ensure the warmth of deerskin rather than grass and the leaves of trees.³⁷

While Powhatans wore utilitarian clothes, the English gentlemen refused to give up their traditional wool attire. Englishmen chose not to smear their bodies with unpleasant-smelling animal fat. As a result,

³⁷ Rountree and Turner, 88.

Englishmen suffered heat stroke and mosquito-spread diseases. Here again, the Powhatans held the survival advantage over the English, but cultural traditions like generosity and kindness made them vulnerable to expedient decimation.

The Powhatans' care of infants shows their dedication to constant work—something the Jamestown gentlemen were unaccustomed to. Infants entered the routines of daily Powhatan life at birth. Mothers worked as they carried babies in crude cradleboards. In cold weather, Powhatans wrapped their children in deerskins first to prevent hypothermia. Infants bathed with mothers, even in very cold weather. Mothers smeared infants with animal fat just like adults. According to John Smith, Powhatans smeared their bodies with animal fat to “tan their skins, that after a year or two, no weather will hurt them.”³⁸ Infant mortality was high, with very few children reaching the age of two. Causes of death varied, but Powhatans did not condone the deliberate killing of a child.^{39,40}

Powhatans had a low birthrate for a number of reasons. Men often left the marriage bed for long periods of time to hunt and fish.

³⁸ Smith, *A True Relation*, 34.

³⁹ Spelman, Henry, *Relation of Virginia, 1609*, In *Jamestown Narratives*, 313

⁴⁰ DeBry, “Their Manner of Careynge Ther Children and a Tyere of the Cheiffe Ladyes of the Towne of Dasamonquepeuc”, 141

Additionally, women removed themselves from the presence of men during menstruation cycles, as well as before and after childbirth. Women breast-fed for long periods of time, during which fertility was lessened. Men engaged multiple sexual partners, which may have affected sperm counts and increased venereal disease.

Powhatans loved their children and reared them gently. Children received multiple names in their lifetimes, earned by deeds. Powhatans used minimal lecturing and very little physical discipline with their children, in hopes they learn through examples set before them. They also feared that children would commit suicide easily.

Young Powhatan females helped their mothers work. According to Smith, “they make mats, baskets, pots, mortars, pound their corn, gather their corn, bear all kind of burdens and such like.”⁴¹ Women had to keep constant wood fires in houses to prevent bad luck, which required gathering burdensome firewood. Women and girls left the house to get things in order to complete their work. Gathering wild plants required physical fitness as well because some plants had stubborn roots buried deep underground.

Cooking involved basic methods, but constant work. Girls learned to cook before they learned all of the plants that should be gathered. Food

⁴¹ Smith, *A True Relation*, 56.

was roasted over fires, grilled on hot, flat, stones, and stewed in hominy pots. Powhatans did not prepare specific meals except for special occasions; instead they ate when they were hungry, so food was kept constantly stewing, which caused stress on pottery. Girls learned to collect clay and produce backup pots.

The Powhatans' family roles and cooking skills were a survival advantage they held over the English, but did not exploit. Instead, they interacted with the English and taught them these valuable survival skills. The teaching of something as simple as how to cook food eventually facilitated the Powhatans' expedient decimation.

Women also completed most of the farm work. Men cleared a plot of land usually a year in advance. Then, women made holes every couple of feet, usually in a grid pattern. They planted beans, corn, and squash, kept the weeds out, and piled dirt around the bases of plants to increase moisture retention. The Powhatans harvested the corn when it was still green. They stationed men and boys around the fields near harvest time to shoot wild animals that might damage the crops.

Young boys lived different lifestyles than Powhatan females. Boys helped their mothers until the age of three. Then, boys began honing hunting skills and warrior tactics. As children, the boys practiced target shooting with mother and father, sometimes not receiving food until they

hit their targets. When a Powhatan boy demonstrated competent hunting skills, his father brought him on hunting expeditions, then gave him a new name to replace his baby name.

Powhatan men, like women, had to be physically fit. Animals that Powhatans shot but only wounded often had to be chased through the woods to obtain the carcasses. Chases could cover many miles. Powhatans fought enemies using guerilla warfare, which involved sneaking up on the prey, doing as much damage as possible, kidnapping women and children, and then running all the way home. The Powhatans did not use load-bearing animals until the Europeans came. This evidence suggests excellent cardio-vascular health.⁴²

Powhatan boys had to earn their way into manhood in order to be taken seriously. At the proper age, boys went on “vision quests” that meant leaving town and going to a sacred unmarked place where they prostrated themselves until a spirit communicated with them through visions. Boys went through *huskanaws*, or hazing ceremonies to make them into men. Distinctions between huskanaws and vision quests are unclear. Boys were expected to go through the huskanaw once they mastered hunting skills, usually between ten and fifteen. Huskanaws symbolically (and often literally) “killed” the boys so they could be “reborn”

⁴² DeBry, “A Weroan or Great Lorde of Virginia”, 127.

as men. The rigorous process of huskanaw often resulted in death for the Powhatans who endured it. After the mock killing, the boys remained alone in the forest to be caged and drugged—the idea was to make them forget everything about their previous lives. During huskanaw, boys also suffered food deprivation. Powhatans considered boys who died from this process to be divine sacrifices. Beverley described this ordeal:

the principal part of the business is to carry them into the woods, and there keep them under confinement, and destitute of all society, for several months; giving them no other sustenance, but the infusion, or decoction of some poisonous intoxicating roots; by virtue of which physic, and by the severity of discipline, which they undergo, they become stark staring mad: In which condition they are kept eighteen or twenty days.⁴³

As the survivors came down from the drugs, the *keepers* (older men possessing military honors) tested the boys to ensure amnesia. The keepers then taught the boys everything, starting with eating. The boys would be re-huskanawed if they acted childishly or showed any memory of childhood thereafter.⁴⁴

Powhatan men could retire from war and hunting in their early thirties. At retirement, they served as counselors in matters of politics and military action. Only married men could serve on a war council. Powhatan girls became eligible for marriage when they began

⁴³ Beverley, Robert, Wright, Louis B., ed., *The History and Present State of Virginia, 1705*, (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1947), 207

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 209

menstruating. At that point, girls grew their hair out and donned deerskin aprons. Some girls delayed marriage because of their extreme physical activity—low percentages of body fat in females caused a delay in menarche. Nevertheless, girls commonly married in their early teens, sometimes even prepubescently in cases of diplomatic marriage. Only males arrived in the first years at Jamestown, so the Powhatans could have simply bred the English out, but they refrained from doing so. Their restraint, yet again, expedited their decimation.

Prior to marriage, a courtship occurred in which the man would bring the woman presents of food to impress her parents. If the family agreed on marriage, the man paid the parents for the value of the wife. Then, bride and groom went home to reside with the groom's family.

Good husbands provided for their families. They supplied women with ample carcasses to process. Powhatans did not choose to marry for emotional reasons alone. Women dallied outside of the institution with permission. Men who hunted well provided for more than one family and had the option of taking on multiple wives. Sometimes marriage lasted for life. Other times, Powhatans married by contracts that would run out at the end of a year. Powhatans permitted divorce. They divided children of divorce between parents based on gender. Chiefs took many wives, paid

whatever they wanted to their in-laws (because the chiefs outranked all), and never allowed wives to have outside dalliances.

Powhatans treated one another with respectful manners.

Powhatans taught manners by example from infancy on. Powhatans greatly valued self-control. Powhatans would not enter into conflict with their own people. This meant avoiding insulting others and not allowing oneself to feel insulted. No one had the right to interfere in personal quarrels—Powhatans thought this would prevent escalation. Any hostility felt towards other Powhatans was deflected into enemy warfare and torture, or magic making. If a Powhatan mistrusted another Powhatan, he kept it to himself politely. This code of Powhatan politeness eventually made the Powhatans vulnerable to conquest. When the Powhatans disagreed with aggressive English actions, they kept silent as was cultural norm. The English interpreted the silence as submission.

The Powhatans followed a belief in a duality of deities. English accounts of Powhatan religion are sketchy and poorly understood. Later studies of Powhatan descendents reveal a clearer understanding. In the early years of contact, Strachey reported that:

their chief god they worship is no other indeed than the devil, whom they make presentments of and shadow under the form of an idol which they entitle *Okeus* and whom they worship as did the

Romans did their hurtful god [Jupiter] more for fear of harm than of hope of any good.⁴⁵

In the same account, Strachey wrote about a separate Powhatan deity, considered the “Great God”:

who governs all the world, and makes the sun to shine, creating the moon and stars his companions, great powers, and which dwell with him, and by whose virtues and influences, the under earth is tempered, and brings forth her fruits according to her seasons, they calling Ahone, the good and peaceable god, requires no such duties, nor needs be sacrificed unto, for he intendeth all good unto them, and will do no harm, only the displeased Okeus looking into all men’s actions and examining the same according to the severe scale of justice, punishes them with sicknesses, beats them, and strikes their ripe corn with blastings, storms, and thunderclaps, stirs up war and makes their women false unto them, such is the misery and thralldom under which Satan hath bound these wretched miscreants.⁴⁶

Accounts indicate that the Powhatans made their offerings and sacrifices to Okee or Okeus, making them heathens or devil-worshippers in the eyes of the English. Accounts of the beliefs of Algonquians of Massachusetts⁴⁷ and Jesuit descriptions⁴⁸ indicate a duality of deities.

⁴⁵ Gleach, Frederic W, *Powhatan’s World and Colonial Virginia: A Conflict of Cultures*, (Lincoln and London: The University of Nebraska Press, 1997), 35.

⁴⁶ Strachey, William, 315

⁴⁷ Simmons, William S, *Spirit of New England Tribes: Indian History and Folklore, 1620-1984*, (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1986), 38-40

⁴⁸ Biard, Pierre, *Missio Canadensis: Epistola ex Porturegali in Acadia, transmissa ad Praepositum Generalem Societatis Jesu*, In *The Jesuit Relations and Allied Documents: Travels and Explorations of the Jesuit Missionaries in New France, 1610-1791*, Volume 2, (Cleveland: Burrows Brothers Co., 1896), 77

Blessings occurred at the will of the “great God.” Tragedies occurred at the will of Okeus. Each god became jealous of the other and punished the Powhatans, either by withholding blessings or showering down sickness and death, accordingly.⁴⁹

Powhatans carried out their actions in order to maintain order in the world. They strived for righteousness to maintain balance over evil. The Great God did not require any sacrifices, nor did he judge. Powhatans worshipped the Great God through subordinate spirits, like the *manitoac* (tutelary spirits) and Okee (who, according to Strachey, sat in judgment over the natural world).⁵⁰ The Powhatans strived to practice right behavior in all aspects of life. They emphasized right behavior (moral action) to the extent that, had they left written accounts, would have likely reflected quite poorly on the English. Rightness was based in practice, in daily life, rather than simple belief. The Powhatans acknowledged a constant communion between every individual and the supernatural. They defined that connection culturally through individual knowledge. An individuals’ connection to the spirits facilitated that individual’s ability to act rightly, which increased the individual’s power in the world.

⁴⁹ DeBry, “The Tovvne of Pomeiooc”, 155.

⁵⁰ Loskiel, George Henry, *History of the Mission of the United Brethren among the Indians in North America*, Translated Christian Ignatius LaTrobe, (London, 1794), 40, cited in Gleach, 36

Powhatans believed that huskanawed men possessed higher understandings of moral action. Powhatans expected huskanawed men to serve as spiritual leaders (lesser gods, according to Smith)⁵¹ along with werowances. These men supposedly had closer affinities towards the natural world and righteous action. According to Beverly:

[they] pretend that this violent method of taking away the memory, is to release the youth from all their childish impressions, and from that strong partiality to persons and things, which is contracted before reason comes to take place. They hope by this proceeding to root out all the prepossessions and unreasonable prejudices which are fixed in the minds of children, so that, when the young men come to themselves again, their reason may act freely, without being bypassed by the cheats of custom and education. Thus also they become discharged from the remembrance of any ties by blood, and are established in a state of equality and perfect freedom, to order their actions, and dispose of their persons, as they think fit, without any other control, than that of the Law of Nature. By this means also they become qualified, when they have any public office, equally and impartially to administer justice, without having respect either to friend or relation.⁵²

All Powhatans had relationships with the powers of the supernatural. The ability to have and interpret dreams gave Powhatans insight into the present desires of spirits, and the events to come in the future. An account of this says:

There is scarcely an Indian who does not believe that one or more of these spirits has not been particularly given to him to assist him and make him prosper. This, they claim, has been made known to them in a dream. . . .If an Indian has no *manitto* to be his friend he considers himself forsaken, has nothing upon which he may lean,

⁵¹ Smith, *A True Relation*, 55

⁵² Beverly, 209

has no hope of any assistance and small in his own eyes. On the other hand those who have been thus favored possess a high and proud spirit.⁵³

Again, Powhatans did not regard spirits as supernatural, but as a part of the natural order of the universe. Powhatans frequently encountered spirits in dreams and visions. They considered spiritual encounters to be as “real” as waking encounters. Though the Powhatans’ spirituality did not necessarily made them vulnerable to decimation, the English descriptions of Powhatan spirituality show how the English looked unfavorably upon the native religion. The Powhatan emphasis on right behavior reflected poorly on English attempts to convert them to Christianity. Though written accounts from the Powhatans do not exist, attempts to convert Indians with similar beliefs in New England evoked the following response:

these white men would always be telling us of their great Book which God had given to them, they would persuade us that every man was good who believed in what the Book said, and every man was bad who did not believe in it. They told us a great many things, which they said were written in the good Book, and wanted us to believe it all. We would probably have done so, if we had seen them practise what they pretended to believe, and act according to the good words which they told us. But no! while they held their big Book in one hand, in the other they had murderous weapons, guns and swords, wherewith to kill us, poor Indians! Ah! And they did so

⁵³ Zeisberger, Reverend David, Hulbert, Archer Butler and Schwarze, William Nathaniel, ed., “David Zeisburger’s History of the Northern American Indians”, *Ohio Archaeological and Historical Quarterly* 19, Volumes 1 and 2, 132-133

too, they killed those who believed in their Book, as well as those who did not. They made no distinction.⁵⁴

While many historians attribute the expedient decimation of the Powhatans to the advantage of European firearms over Powhatan bows and arrows, the Powhatans' intensive training instilled skillful behavior in the male population. According to Smith, Powhatan archers shot accurately to forty yards.⁵⁵ In 1590, the English estimated that an Indian archer could fire four to five arrows in the time that it would take a European soldier to fire a single musket shot.⁵⁶ According to Percy:

One of our gentlemen having a target [shield] which he trusted in, thinking it would bear out a flight shot, he set it up against a tree, willing one of the savages to shoot; who took from his back an arrow of an ell long, drew it strongly in his bow, shoots the target a foot through, or better; which was strange being that a pistol could not pierce it. We seeing the force of his bow, afterwards set him up a steel target; he shot again, and burst his arrow all to pieces.⁵⁷

The Powhatans placed emphasis not just on rightful action but also on careful preparation and strategy. They relied heavily on guerilla warfare. Powhatans gained the respect of their enemies through the artful application of strategy. The importance of strength and power faded in

⁵⁴ Heckewelder, Reverend John, *History, Manners, and Customs of the Indian Nations Who Once Inhabited Pennsylvania and the Neighboring States*, (Philadelphia: Historical Society of Pennsylvania, 1876), 188.

⁵⁵ Smith, John, *A True Relation*, 60.

⁵⁶ Smith, John, *A True Relation*, 46.

⁵⁷ Percy, George, *Observations Gathered Out of a Discourse of the Plantation of the Southern Colony in Virginia by the English, 1606*, (Purchas: 1625), in *Jamestown Narratives*, 87.

favor of cunning. The artful application of strategy displayed a masterful integration of natural and supernatural forces and well as available resources. Powhatans who deceived enemies revealed the enemy's inferior understanding of the supernatural.

The Powhatans believed deep symbolism lied in the keeping of hair. Powhatan males wore their hair in warrior fashion to display their manhood. They kept one side of the head shaved or very short. The other side of the head held a long mass of hair. Men braided or decorated the mass of hair with enemies' hands or animal parts following a battle or a hunt to display the success of the event. Powhatans removed this part of the scalp prior to execution to remind their enemies that victims' humanity had transferred. Additionally, scalping demonstrated respect for the enemy, a sign that he had been a worthy opponent. Henry Spelman, who lived among the Powhatans for awhile, described scalping: "Then came the officer to those that should die, and with a shell cut off their long lock, which they wear on the left side of their head, and hung that on a bough before the king's house."⁵⁸ (The Powhatans were proud of the style of their hair and believed it necessary for all humans claiming to be men. Powhatan priest Uttamatomakking objected to the English god

⁵⁸ Spelman, Henry, 300

merely on the grounds that he had not taught the English to wear their hair properly.) The symbolic scalping of an enemy was described thusly:

“When we go to fight an enemy” say they, “we meet on equal ground; and we take off each other’s scalps, if we can. The conqueror, whoever he may be, is entitled to have something to shew to prove his bravery and his triumph, and it would be ungenerous in a warrior to deprive an enemy of the means of acquiring that glory of which he himself is in pursuit. A warrior’s conduct ought to be manly, else he is no man.”⁵⁹

The symbolism of scalping included other meanings of insult and honor based on whether the victim was alive or dead and the context in which it took place.⁶⁰

Symbolism was also an important element of Powhatan torture. Powhatans tortured comrades and enemies to teach discipline. Though English colonists viewed the practice of torture as cruel, Algonquians considered torture a part of living rightly. Skillfully choosing a cunning way to teach the desired lesson displayed the Powhatans’ knowledge of the integration of natural and supernatural. For example, if a man’s lock of hair was a representation of his bravery and a Powhatan male ran away from a battle, a Powhatan torturer may have cut the man’s hair short as a show of weakness. Powhatans expected victims to display strength and stoicism in the endurance of torture. Worthy victims should walk away

⁵⁹ Heckewelder, 215

⁶⁰ DeBry, “The Conieuer”, 143.

uninsulted with a greater wisdom that they previously lacked. William Byrd wrote of Powhatan torture practices:

The prisoners they happen to take alive in these expeditions generally pass their time very scurvily. They put them to all the tortures that ingenious malice and cruelty can invent. And (what shows the baseness of the Indian temper in perfection) they never fail to treat those with the greatest inhumanity that have distinguished themselves most by their bravery; and, if he be a war-captain, they do him to honor to roast him alive, and distribute. . . . to all that had a share in stealing the victory. . . . In the mean time, while these poor wretches are under the anguish of all this inhuman treatment, they disdain so much as to groan, sign, or show the least sign of dismay or concern, so much as in their looks; on the contrary, they make it a point of honor all the time to soften their features, and look as please as if they were in the actual enjoyment of some delight; and if they never sang before in their lives, they will be sure to be melodious on this sad and dismal occasion.⁶¹

Chief Powhatan rapidly expanded his area of control in the decades prior to the establishment of Jamestown. The type of chiefdom he established as a result was highly unusual among Native Americans north of the Aztecs in Mexico. Eastern woodland tribes confederated loosely among themselves to defend against enemies. Powhatan's far-reaching kingdom required tribes under his control to act against long-standing

⁶¹ Byrd, William, Boyd, William K., ed., "History of the Dividing Line Run in the Year 1728, In *Histories of the Dividing Line betwixt Virginia and North Carolina*, (New York: Dover Publications, 1967), 220-222

traditions of individualism and small alliances.⁶² As a result, tribes under Powhatan control disobeyed rules and formed their own alliances among themselves. This in itself made the Powhatans vulnerable to conquest.

When the English arrived, Chief Powhatan entangled himself in a shifting web of priorities. He wanted to maintain control of his newly-expanded kingdom and also of the English, which required a confusing mixture of diplomacy and violence. To increase his popularity as Chief amongst his people, Powhatan tried to make valuable trade relationships with the English, which required he give lavish gifts and nurture their friendship.

Chief Powhatan's resulting policy towards the English was a vacillation of diplomacy and hostility that confused and angered Powhatan tribes. The vacillation further alienated disloyal Powhatan tribes and encouraged the manifestation of the English tendencies towards aggression.⁶³

⁶² Axtell, James, *The Rise and fall of the Powhatan Empire: Indians in Seventeenth-Century Virginia*, (Williamsburg, Virginia: The Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, 1995), 4

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 12-13.

Cultural Factors and Common Explanations for Population Decline (Guns and Germs) Manifested in the Early Years of Anglo- Powhatan Contact (1607-1622)

The first European exposure the Powhatan tribe experienced was at the hands of the Spanish in two brief encounters.

The Spanish made contact with the Powhatan Indians in the late sixteenth century, but did not establish a permanent colony. The Spanish and English, though officially at peace (beginning with the crowning of James I), were in competition over North American land for purposes of colonization.

The English learned of the Powhatan's existence from the Spanish, who arrived to North America decades before. Shortly before they established the St. Augustine post in 1565, the Spanish sent a ship north to explore the Chesapeake Bay. While there, the Spanish took aboard a native, reputedly a chief's son, and transported him to Spain. Somewhere along the way, the boy converted to Christianity and took the name Don Luis. Later, Don Luis traveled with the Spanish to Cuba and St. Augustine. The St. Augustine Jesuits heard Don Luis speak of his native land, and resolved to go north and spread Catholicism there.

The Spanish, just like the English, desired to spread their religion in partial effort to subdue another culture into a second Spain. Historian James Axtell has explained what the missionaries saw:

The fundamental weakness of Indian life, the missionaries felt, was the natives' belief that they ought 'by right of birth, to enjoy the liberty of Wild Ass colts, rendering no homage to any whomsoever, except when they like.' Since 'they are born, live, and die in liberty without restraint, they do not know what is meant by bridle or bit.'⁶⁴

The Spanish first introduced Christianity to the Powhatans. In 1570, the Jesuits, Don Luis, and a Cuban boy named Alonzo de Olmos sailed north and landed in a creek beside Jamestown Island. The Powhatans met them there and spoke of a great famine. The Jesuits sent word to Cuba that they needed corn. When the relief ship arrived, the Indians attacked. The Jesuits captured one native. The hostage confessed that all of the Jesuits who arrived with the first ship had been killed. Don Luis had joined his native people in the killing of the Jesuits. Only Alonzo was spared on account of his youth.

The Spanish may have planned to use kidnapping as a method of religious conversion. The English used the same tactic later by

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 63.

kidnapping Pocahontas and using her capture time as a trial of religious conversion.

Following the attack on the Jesuits, the Spanish tried the Indians under Jesuit law. The Jesuits found many of the Powhatans innocent, but they baptized the rest as Christians and hanged them from the ship's yardarm. The Powhatans spread the news through the Algonquian nation that baptism was not a religious rebirth but a pre-execution ritual. News that baptism occurred just before murder ruined the likelihood that the Powhatans would view the suggestion of religious conversion as anything more than an attempt to conquer. Why would a Powhatan want to be baptized by a European? The example taught them that imminent death would follow.

The English arrived on May 13, 1607. In that same day, they encountered the Powhatan Indians. George Percy described their encounter:

we saw five savages running on the shore. Presently the captain caused the shallop to be manned; so rowing to the shore, the captain called to them in a sign of friendship, but they were at first very timorsome until they saw the captain lay his hand on his heart. Upon that they laid down their bows and arrows and came very boldy to us, making signs to come ashore to their town, which is called by the savages Kecoughtan.⁶⁵

⁶⁵ Percy, George, *Observations Gathered Out of a Discourse*, 91

In this first encounter, the Powhatans were suspicious but laid down their weapons in submission, a puzzling action considering that previous European visits had resulted in tragedy for their people. One explanation for their submission is the Powhatans' reliance on the spiritual interpretation of their Chief. Chief Powhatan served as spiritual leader and interpreter of visions for his people. Powhatan likely predicted further European visitors after the Roanoke colony failed. At the fulfillment of the vision, the Powhatans voluntarily made themselves vulnerable in the first encounter with the English. Additionally, the English took the upper hand in this first encounter, displaying their record for colonizing previously inhabited lands and annihilating the native culture.

The English set up camp on Jamestown Island and began life in Virginia. The Powhatan Indians attacked the English just two weeks after the first encounter. On May 26, Chief Powhatan and several other leaders of the tribe entertained Captain Christopher Newport, Captain John Smith, and twenty other leaders of the colony upstream while between two hundred and four hundred warriors attacked the main body of the English

at Jamestown and encountered the reality of English gunfire. In the short attack, Powhatans killed two Englishmen and wounded a dozen others.⁶⁶

Though there is no written record of why the Powhatans attacked the English on May 26, 1607, some historians assume it was a sign of force—the Powhatans wanted to let the English know that Jamestown was Indian Territory. Some of the English thought that the Powhatans meant to intimidate from the start.⁶⁷ If that was the case, then why did the Powhatans yield so quickly in the previous encounter?

In this encounter, the Powhatans displayed their vacillation between diplomacy and hostility that confused the English into defensive positions from the beginning. Captain Smith wrote, “with all speed we palisadoed our fort. Each other day for six or seven days we had alarums by ambuscades, and four or five cruelly wounded by being abroad. The Indians’ loss we know not but as they report three were slain and divers hurt.”⁶⁸

The English strengthened their fort and on June 21, Chief Powhatan’s brother, Opechancanough, sent messages of peace to the English. A Powhatan leader said, “we can plant any where, . . . and we

⁶⁶ Fausz, John Frederick, *The Powhatan Uprising of 1622: A Historical Study of Ethnocentrism and Cultural Conflict*, (Ph.D. Dissertation, The College of William and Mary: University Microfilms International, 1977), 222

⁶⁷ Beverley, 192.

⁶⁸ Smith, *A True Relation*, 147.

know you cannot live if you want our harvest. . . . if you promise peace we will believe you, if you proceed in revenge, we will abandon the Countrie.”⁶⁹

The Powhatans had power over the English. If their cultural positions were reversed (and the Powhatans were predisposed to conquer other cultures while the English were predisposed to vacillating diplomatic tactics and traditions of righteous behavior), the English would have taken their position of agricultural power to annihilate the opposing culture in one fell swoop—conquer or be conquered. The Powhatans, on the other hand, handled their power with their traditions of righteous behavior—they were willing to be kind. By helping the English, or even speaking of it, they made themselves vulnerable to conquest or decimation from the very start.

Anglo-Powhatan trade relationships formed at first contact. Trade relationships show the Powhatans’ kindness that made them vulnerable and English aggressive tendencies that facilitated expedient decimation. During the contact period, the Powhatans learned that the English had something of great value, copper. The Powhatans valued European copper because it was a richer, redder color than what was available naturally on

⁶⁹ Smith, John, *The General History: The Third Book—The Proceedings and Accidents of the English colony in Virginia*, (London: Printed by I.D. and I.H., 1624). In *Jamestown Narratives*, 228.

the Atlantic coast. Copper symbolized wealth and status among the Indians so it became a valuable trade entity for the English.⁷⁰ Trade grew to be of great value to the English in the coming months. Since the English came to Virginia in search of gold, they brought many tools to mine, but not necessarily to farm. Also, though game was abundant in Eastern Virginia, evidence shows that early years at Jamestown coincided with the worst drought in centuries, debilitating the food supply for all.⁷¹ There was simply no way the Jamestown colonists could have survived without the help of the Powhatans through gifts and trade. If the Powhtans had withheld aid, a very different North America would likely exist today.

The English death rates at Jamestown show the survival advantage the Powhatans held, but chose not to extort. Only thirty-eight of the original one hundred and four English males survived the first summer at Jamestown, due to the outbreak of diseases such as dysentery, beri-beri, and typhoid.⁷² Dysentery spread from the lack of drinkable water. Jamestown Island was swampy, home to billions of insects, which caused and spread the typhoid, and surrounded by the brackish James River.

⁷⁰ Mapp, Alfred J., *The Virginia Experiment*, (LaSalle, Illinois: Open Court, 1957), 49.

⁷¹ Colonial National Historical Park. *Jamestown Archeological Assessment*, (Yorktown, Virginia: National Park Service, 2002), 5.

⁷² Fausz, 232.

The English possessed poor knowledge on water desalinization, and mixed alcohol with the brackish water intending to make it drinkable. The alcohol dehydrated them further, accelerating the onset of dysentery. Eventually, the English learned that poor water caused their disease and attempted to dig wells, but the wells were not nearly deep enough.⁷³

A common explanation for Powhatan decimation is the spread of disease. As humans encounter disease-spreading microbes, their bodies naturally mobilize their immune systems. White blood cells and other immune-system cells actively seek out foreign microbes. As that process occurs, the body gradually builds antibodies that make the body less likely to become reinfected because it has cracked the microbe-code to defeat the virus. Sometimes this immunity is only temporary (the flu or the common cold), and sometimes the immunity spans a lifetime (measles, mumps, rubella, pertussis, or smallpox).

Microbes, just like animals or humans, constantly fight for survival. As vaccinations emerge or humans develop immunity, some microbes have the ability to mutate into new forms that human antibodies do not recognize. Specific diseases known for this include the flu, malaria, and AIDS. Since microbes feed on nutrients within the human body, they must create new ways to travel to other victims once the original host

⁷³ Colonial National Historical Park, 15.

becomes resistant or dead. These methods of travel are experienced by humans as “symptoms of disease” and involve the messy purging of germ-ridden bodily fluids that can reinfect others.

Natural selection is the slow genetic process of passing immunity from generation to generation. Survivors of epidemics are able to pass down higher resistance levels for specific microbes that may help prevent disease. This process is very slow and often requires multiple exposures to similar microbes over several generations.

In order for disease-carrying microbes to bypass the hurdles of nature and thrive into an epidemic, specific factors must be in place. The population must have low resistance so the microbe can spread quickly (through symptoms) from person to person. The microbe must present itself as an “acute” illness; one in which the host either recovers completely or dies within a short time. Lastly, microbes typically do not live in animals or the soil. The result of these factors is an epidemic—disease-carrying microbes spread rapidly through a population, annihilating their victims. Those who survive gain lifelong immunity that will spread to any offspring, but as a milder immunity.

Though most epidemic-causing microbes do not live in animals, similar pathogens that do live in animals can expedite the spread of the original microbe. As a result, the influence of domesticated livestock in

the Americas expedited the spread of European diseases. Cattle, specifically, carry pathogens of close relation to several human diseases. This means a mutant form can develop in humans, violently in humans without prior exposure, and spread quickly. Cattle carry pathogens closely related to measles, tuberculosis, and smallpox. Pigs, dogs, and ducks carry pathogens most closely related to the flu, pertussis, and malaria.⁷⁴ As the English settled more permanently at Jamestown, they brought more livestock from England to establish food production and decimated more of the native population.

Beri-beri is a disease caused by vitamin deficiencies, mainly B complex vitamins that are found in grains and cereals. The English gentlemen who made up the original Jamestown colonists were unaccustomed to physical labor or Eastern North American agricultural practices. They instead had to rely on the Powhatans to supply grains. The drought allowed the Powhatans to provide only for themselves, so many English perished from lack of Powhatan gifts of foodstuffs.

The outbreaks of typhoid in the early years at Jamestown are attributed to the tremendous numbers of insects in Jamestown, especially disease-carrying mayflies and mosquitoes. The English viewed the Powhatans as savages of a lower class, so would not resort to smearing their bodies with animal fat to keep insects away, as the Powhatans did.

⁷⁴ Diamond, 207

Powhatan gifts of wholesome food and drinkable water did not sustain all of the English, but allowed many of them to survive in the early years at Jamestown.⁷⁵ The Powhatans had the opportunity to annihilate the English early on, simply by sitting back and waiting for them to kill themselves, but instead chose to follow Powhatan traditions of righteous behavior. Smith and Percy reported: “Our mortall enemies. . .did releeve us with victuals, as Bread, Corne, fish, and flesh in great plentie,”⁷⁶ and “divers Kings in the Countrie [contributed] to our great comfort.”⁷⁷

In fact, although the Powhatans had the survival advantage in their relationship with the Jamestown colonists, Chief Powhatan took several steps to befriend Captain John Smith, a presumed English leader.

In December 1607, Opechancanough and several hundred Pamunkey Indians captured Captain John Smith. The Powhatan Indians studied Smith for about a month. Smith talked at length with Opechancanough about English culture. Opechancanough took particular interest in English sailing ships, navigation, astronomy, and the Christian God.⁷⁸

⁷⁵ Smith, *A True Relation*, 149.

⁷⁶ Percy, George, *A True Relation of the Proceedings and Occurrents to moment Which Have Hap'ned in Virginia from the Time Sire Thomas Gates was Shipwrack's Upon the Bermudes, Until My Departure Out of the Country*, (Virginia, 1612). in *Jamestown Narratives*, 503.

⁷⁷ Smith, *A True Relation*, 150.

⁷⁸ Fausz, 234

Late in December, the Powhatans took Smith to Werowocomoco, where more than 200 watched Smith's questioning in the court of Manatowick. During the questioning, Smith lied to Chief Powhatan: He told Powhatan that the English were in Jamestown only long enough to take revenge on the Manacan Indians for killing Captain Newport's son.⁷⁹ Though Smith, one of the English leaders, came to Jamestown under the guise of Christian evangelism, he told a deliberate lie to the leader of the Powhatans, who were key to English survival.

The differences in views on acculturation became clear during Smith's questioning. For Chief Powhatan, his empire was his home that he had grown to lead. Smith described Powhatan: "What pride hee had in his great and spacious Dominions, seeing that all hee knew were under his Territories...". In contrast, Smith confessed that an Englishman's empire expanded from "the innumerable multitude of his ships" and "the terrible manner of European fighting."⁸⁰ The contrast in views on empire shows that the English had a greater tendency towards conquering other cultures than the Powhatans did. The English constantly expanded their empire through naval conquest, the Powhatans did not.

After Smith's questioning, he went through a meaningful ceremony that displayed Powhatan's power and mercy. Powhatan braves laid Smith

⁷⁹ Fausz, 235

⁸⁰ Smith, *A True Relation*, 150

on the ground in front of Chief Powhatan. On either side of Smith's head stood an Indian warrior bearing a heavy tomahawk, in preparation to "bashe Smith's brains". Pocahontas, regarded as favorite among Chief Powhatan's 100 children, knelt beside Smith and placed her head on top of his as if to block the blow of the tomahawks.⁸¹

This encounter may have been an adoption ritual for Smith or a dramatic portrayal of Powhatan's power and mercy. In either case, Powhatan asked questions of Smith and spared his life, although Powhatan had the opportunity to kill Smith. While Chief Powhatan's choices make him a historical diplomat, he made himself vulnerable to conquest merely by trusting Smith to return acts of kindness, as was the Powhatan custom. After Smith's release, the Powhatans regarded him as favorite among the colonists for a short while.⁸²

Hardship in Jamestown grew in severity during the winter of 1607-1608. The Powhatans and the English got along relatively peacefully, exchanging gifts and holding great feasts, but tensions soon unfolded.

One area of tension between the two groups pivoted over the issue of trade. While the English wanted to discuss the terms of trade before making a transaction, the Powhatans believed the English should simply give the Indians what they requested. In return, the Powhatans later

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 151.

⁸² Fausz, 225.

repaid the English with gifts that the Powhatans themselves chose. For example, Captain Newport tried to accommodate the Powhatans' way of trading, and in doing so gave enough glass and copper to win several hundred bushels of corn, yet only received a gift of four bushels. Smith remedied the problem by threatening the Powhatans, thereby increasing tension between the two groups.⁸³ Again, the trade practices of the Powhatans required both diplomacy and kindness, admirable qualities that nevertheless made the Powhatans vulnerable to conquest. The English didn't always give the Powhatans comparable gifts in return for a trade, and when the English didn't receive the gifts they wanted from the Powhatans in exchange for trade, they resorted to intimidation tactics.

In 1608, Smith accepted the presidency of the resident Virginia Council, and set about to put the Powhatans on the defensive and regain the upper hand of conquest. Smith adopted a renewed policy of aggression and intimidation in order to receive survival necessities. He began by firing on a group of Nansemond Indians without provocation. Instead of fighting back, the intimidated werowance promised future trade with Smith and his people and provided them with a feast. Later, Smith's men kept some of the Nansemonds prisoner, also for no historically recorded reason.⁸⁴

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 239.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 243.

Upon learning of Smith's policy of aggression, Chief Powhatan sent Pocahontas to negotiate the captives' release and Opecancanough sent gifts to Smith to abate his anger. This action demonstrated the principles of hospitality and kindness that in fact made the Powhatans vulnerable to conquest.

Smith's response to these actions displayed the English tendency towards conquest. Smith released the Nansemond prisoner after receiving the gifts. He maintained the upper hand of the English by whipping a Paspahegh warrior the very next day simply for "scoffing." Later, Smith threatened to destroy all Nansemond canoes, lodges, and corn. In return, the Nansemonds gave the English 400 bushels of corn. The English appreciated the rewards of the new aggression policy and it became common practice.

Anglo-Powhatan tension continued to grow from 1608-1609 during the Starving Time. The drought worsened, and the Indians struggled to survive with the food they had stored for themselves. The Powhatans stopped giving gifts to the English. Starving and dehydrated, the English nearly vanished in Jamestown, as all but 60 of 500 men perished before spring. Some resorted to cannibalism. Percy observed:

"A world of miseries ensued,. . .some, to satisfy their hunger, have robbed the store, for the which I caused them to be executed. Then having fed upon horses and other beasts as long as they lasted, we were glad to make shift with vermin,

as dogs, cats, rats, and mice. All fish that come to net to satisfy cruel hunger, as to eat boots, shoes, or any other leather some could come by. And those being spent and devoured, some were enforced to search the woods and to feed upon serpents and snakes and to dig the earth for wild and unknown roots.”⁸⁵

While suffering starvation, the English continued with their policies of aggression towards the Indians. In 1609, Smith aimed a cocked pistol at the chest of Opechancanough, whom he had befriended the year before. Smith also beat and spurned Wecuttanow, Opechancanough’s son. Powhatan confronted Smith and exposed his lie, saying that the English had come not to resupply and patch ships, but to destroy and intimidate instead. Ironically, after his cruelty towards Opechancanough, Smith said that true friends had little to fear, for “by the advantage we have by our armes...{if} wee intended you anie hurt, long ere this wee could have effected it.” His arrogance cooberated his comment that wars were Englishmen’s “chiefest pleasure.”⁸⁶ Here evidenced, was the English tendency towards aggression yet again.

English aggression continued and worsened in the following months. In September of 1609, Captain John Marin slaughtered several Nansemonds. The English also tormented Powhatan villagers by stealing corn and beating Indians. The Powhatans retaliated, killing seventeen

⁸⁵ Percy, *A True Relation*, 504.

⁸⁶ Fausz, 243.

Englishmen in retaliation as they scavaged for food near Kecoughtan. In the autumn of 1609, the Powhatans assaulted Captain Francis West and killed eleven men under his command. In return, Captain West encountered the Patawomekes and cut off two of their heads and other appendages.⁸⁷

As tensions worsened, the Pamunkeys shot arrows into thirty-three of the fifty men under Captain John Ratcliffe. Chief Powhatan captured Ratcliffe and “he caused to be bound unto a tree naked with a fire before, and by women his flesh was scraped from his bones with mussel shells and, before his face, thrown into the fire; and so for want of circumspection miserable perished.”⁸⁸ This cruel execution was proof that the Powhatans had the drive and ability to fight for their lives. By this point, intimidation replaced trade and diplomacy. Though the Powhatans tried to maintain peace through negotiation, they had to defend themselves and did so in the same fashion of cruel aggression that the English seemed to favor.

Since the English had firearms, they had an advantage in the area of intimidation. The Powhatans relied on spiritual leaders and less advanced weaponry to intimidate. In one instance, Powhatan priests attempted to control storms in an effort to hold off enemy fire from the

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 243.

⁸⁸ Percy, *A True Relation*, 504.

English. The English witnessed this type of ritual in 1611 along the Nansemond River when the Powhatan priests called on the forces of nature to soak the enemies' guns. The Powhatan fear of English firearms was justified.

Things changed for the English on May 23, 1609, when the Virginia Company of London obtained a new charter. The new charter gave the Company direct control of the Jamestown colony. Directors of the Company thereby committed themselves to the implementation of a strong, permanent colony.⁸⁹ They rededicated themselves to the goal of converting the Indians to Protestantism, a task that proved exceptionally difficult after the previous years of aggression and bloodshed. King James stated that the "principall effect which wee cann desire or expert of Virginia was the conversion and reduccion of the [native] people in those partes unto the true worship of God and Christian religion."⁹⁰

In the summer of 1610, a ship arrived with Sir Thomas Gates, Sir George Somers, William Strachey, Thomas West, Lord De La Warr, and another 450 people, along with a year's provisions.⁹¹ With this extra manpower, the English initiated an aggressive policy of forced acculturation towards the Powhatans. The new charter read:

⁸⁹ Fausz, 255.

⁹⁰ Smith, *The General History*, 234.

⁹¹ Fausz, 254.

You shall, with all propensenes and diligence, endeavour the conversion of the natives. . . as the most pious and noble end of the plantacion, which the better to effect you must procure from them some convenient number of their children to be brought up in your language and manners, and . . . we thinke it reasonable you first remove from them all and detaining them prisoners, for they are so wrapped up in the fogge and miserie of their iniquity and so terrivied with their continuall tirrany, chained, under the bond of deathe unto the divell that while they live amounge them to poison and ingecte them into their mindes, you shall never make any great progress into this glorious worker, nor have any civill peace of concurre with them.⁹²

Gates followed orders to lead as governor and religious leader at Jamestown. Upon his arrival in 1610, he immediately set to work mending the structure of government and quality of life for the Jamestown colonists. Colonist John Rolfe said, “Our present governor at Jamestown is repairing and making straight what he findeth decayed and crooked. . .”⁹³

The language of Gates’ instructions ordered him to conquer the Powhatans: “If you make friendship with any of these nations as you must doe, choose to doe it with those that are farthest from you and enemies unto those amonge whom you dwell, for you shall have least occasion to have differences with them.”⁹⁴ The colonists followed orders to

⁹² Virginia Council, “Instructions to Gates” 1609, in Bemiss, Samuel M., ed. *The Three Charters of the Virginia Company of London with Seven Related Documents; 1606-1621*, (Williamsburg, Virginia: Virginia 350th Anniversary Foundation, 1957), 87.

⁹³ Rolfe, John, *Letter to Sandys*, (Virginia, 1617), 432.

⁹⁴ Bemiss, 63.

seize village cornfields and hold werowances as hostages to prevent Powhatans from fleeing and thus preventing the English from obtaining foodstuffs. Under such desperate conditions, the English were motivated to all-out conquer, while the Powhatans were still trying to negotiate peace.

The English used aggressive methods to convert the Powhatans to Christianity. Meanwhile, the Powhatans kept to their traditions of kindness. Evidence suggests that the English motivation to convert the Powhatans was founded in military dominance, not in the desire to save souls. Lord De La Warr's instructions outlined orders to abduct or harm Powhatan religious leaders in order to convert the Powhatans:

"Yet is very expedient that your Lordship with all diligence endeavor the conversion of the natives and savages to the knowledge and worship of the true God and their redeemer Christ Jesus as the most pious and noble end of this plantation, [which] the better to effect, you are to procure from them some of their Children to be brought up in our language and manners and if you think it necessary you first remove from them Quiacooks or priests by a surprise of them and detaining them prisoners and in case they shall be willful obstinate, then to send us some 3 or 4 of them into England [so that] we may endeavor their conversion there."⁹⁵

In 1611, a new government under martial law ruled Jamestown. Under the new law, "No soldier may speak or have any private conference with any of the savages, without leave of his captain, nor his caption

⁹⁵ Mossiker, Frances *Pocahontas: The Life and the Legend*. (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1976), 157.

without leave of his chief officer, upon pain of death.”⁹⁶ In what manner, therefore, did the English expect to convert the Powhatans if they could not hold private conversations together? Though there are records of conversions, there is no written record relating the methodology of converting a Powhatan to Protestantism. The events of the Anglo-Powhatan war (1609-1613) suggest that the methodology was aggressive and violent. This evidences English tendencies towards aggression.

During the Anglo-Powhatan war, the English attempted to conquer the Powhatans by spreading Protestantism. In so doing, they executed Powhatan priests. The English justified this action as a preventive necessity—“an acceptable service to God. . .[as] Jesus king of Israell did when he assembled all the priests of Baal, and slue them to the last man.”⁹⁷

The Powhatans fought back to defend themselves against the onslaught of abductions and murders. One may wonder if there were times that the Powhatans wished they had allowed the English to starve instead of helping them. After all, the Powhatans never tried to convert the English to the Powhatan religion—that would have undermined the Powhatan tradition of kindness. At times, the Powhatans asked the English to pray to the Protestant god for rain during the great drought,

⁹⁶ Flaherty, 44.

⁹⁷ Strachey, 94.

because Powhatan gods didn't send any.⁹⁸ Not the Powhatans' action, but their restraint, demonstrated their vulnerability to conquest.

The contrasting conquering tendencies of the English revealed themselves further as the Anglo-Powhatan war continued. Gates commenced a series of offensives designed to avenge specific tribes for actions against the English during the Starving Time. Against the Kecoughtans, Gates led a sudden, brutal attack and "fell in upon them, put five to the sword, wounded many others, some of them being after found in the woods with such extraordinary large and mortal wounds that it seems strange they could flee so far."⁹⁹ In this attack, Powhatan lost his easternmost outpost, and the English gained many fertile fields.¹⁰⁰

On August 9, 1610, Percy led seventy men against the Paspaheghs. In this attack, he killed sixteen warriors and captured the wife and children of the werowance, Wowinchopunk. The English burned the Paspahegh lodges and cut down their corn. Later, Percy wrote, "we marched with the queen and her children to boats again where, . . . my soldiers did begin to murmur because the queen and her children were spared. . . it was agreed upon to put the children to death, . . . by throwing them overboard and shooting out their brains in the water."¹⁰¹

⁹⁸ Smith, *A True Relation*, 151.

⁹⁹ Percy, *A True Relation*, 503.

¹⁰⁰ Fausz, 271.

¹⁰¹ Percy, *A True Relation*, 510.

The post-traumatic stress symptoms of the English manifested themselves in this cruel act.

The English continued their conquest of the Powhatans when they put the Queen of Paspahegh to the sword at Jamestown. She had already witnessed the brutal and senseless murder of her children, and when she returned to Jamestown, Lord De La Warr wanted her burned alive. Percy argued instead to run her through.¹⁰²

The English then set out to exact revenge on the Chickahominies. Percy dispatched his force to raid the Chickahominies some fourteen miles from the mouth of the Chickahominy river. The English cut down the corn, and destroyed what they assumed were idols and temples. They then “ransacked their temples, tooke downe the corpses of their dead kings from their toambes and carried away thire pearles, copper, and bracelettes, wherewith they doe decore their kings’ funderalles.”¹⁰³

This communication-by-aggression further reveals the English desire to expediently decimate the Powhatans. Gates ordered the cutting off of a local Indian warrior’s hand to serve as a warning to Powhatans who wished to venture near Jamestown. Indeed, Indians did not venture in, but that did not stop the English from venturing out to rampage. In September 1610, Captain Argall attacked the Warraskoyacks in retaliation

¹⁰² Percy, *A True Relation*, 510.

¹⁰³ Smith, *The General History*, 147.

for having mocked the governor. Argall burned everything and cut down all of the corn near the Warraskoyack community. Then, in February 1611, the English killed Wowinchipunk, the Paspahegh werowance who had already lost his tribe, children, and wife to English cruelty. The Paspaheghs lost their leader and their valuable land.¹⁰⁴

On March 28, 1611, Lord De La Warr left Virginia. Soon after, a force of 500 or 600 Indians attacked and wiped out a small English garrison stationed at the blockhouse on Jamestown Island. De La Warr returned in less than two months with armor and 300 more men. In the summer of 1611, Dale led 100 men against the Nansamunds, causing massive casualties, none of which were English. The Nansamunds, by that time, were so powerless that they prayed for rain merely to extinguish the English muskets.¹⁰⁵

In September of 1611, Gates returned to Virginia with yet another 300 people to aid in man- and fire-power. With the increase in strength, Dale attempted to establish an upriver settlement at Henrico. To do this, he invaded a region near Powhatan's native village, where he suffered furious assaults from Indian forces. The Powhatans, however, unsuccessfully resisted Dale's invasion. In the months after, English Henrico flourished and the population surpassed Jamestown's.

¹⁰⁴ Fausz, 277.

¹⁰⁵ Fausz, 278-279.

In the Anglo-Powhatan war, the English devastated the villages of the Nansamunds, Kecoughtans, Paspaheghs, Chickahominies, Warrascoyacks, and the Appomattocks. The English, as instructed, established friendly relationships with the Indians who lived far from Jamestown, the Patawomekes, Accohannocs, and Accomacs, effectively alienating them from Chief Powhatan's influence. In 1612, Captain Argall received 1,100 bushels of corn, a message that meant he had sealed an alliance with the Patawomakes against the Powhatans.¹⁰⁶

Even after all of the brutality, Chief Powhatan still refused to submit to the English. He made efforts to ally with the English; his people had helped them eat when they were starving and served as examples for English survival. Yet still, Smith betrayed Powhatan's friendship, and the English attacked Powhatan's allies and made alliances with Powhatan's enemies. While Chief Powhatan followed the Powhatan tradition of kindness, Smith acted aggressively to conquer. This betrayal further evidenced how the differences between the two cultural groups expedited the decimation of the Powhatan Indians.

The English captured Pocahontas in March 1613. The month before her capture, the English raided the Pamunkeys and tried to convince Powhatan one last time to accept the terms of his adversaries. The English attempted to ransom Pocahontas. This kidnapping reveals the

¹⁰⁶ Fausz, 281.

English tendency towards conquest and the Powhatan tendencies towards kindness.

As a child, Pocahontas won favor among the English for her compassion and boldness. She was the go-between for her father. Pocahontas often brought the English food and gifts and taught them survival skills. English records do not show much of how Pocahontas was treated during her capture, except that she won the heart of colonist and farmer, John Rolfe.

John Rolfe served as a leader in Jamestown. Rolfe, a pious man, made efforts to convert Pocahontas to Protestantism. With the help of the local Reverend, Rolfe successfully converted Pocahontas to Protestantism.¹⁰⁷

Once baptized, Pocahontas took the Christian name Rebecca. In the *Genesis* account of the origins of the people of Israel, Abraham sent his senior servant to his own birthplace to find a suitable woman to marry Isaac, Abraham's son. The servant returned with Abraham's grandniece, Rebecca. The servant tested Rebecca by asking women for water from their wells. Rebecca offered water not only to the servant, but to his camels, and offered hospitality. Pocahontas' choice of name reveals the Powhatan tendency towards hospitality that made them vulnerable to

¹⁰⁷ Crankanthorpe, Richard, *A Sermon at the Solemnizing of the Happie Inauguration of King James*, (London, 1609), 77.

conquest. When Rebecca was pregnant with twins, God told her she carried two nations and two cultures of people. The English used the conversion of Pocahontas and later the marriage of Pocahontas and Rolfe as a new step in the conquest of the Powhatan Indians.

Rolfe wrote to Dale and asked for permission to marry Pocahontas. The couple gained permission, both from Dale and from Powhatan. Chief Powhatan struggled with trusting the English with his favorite daughter, but took the risk in hopes of bringing peace between the two cultures. The chief was old when he made the decision to allow the marriage, and one may argue that his decision came out of mere resignation. After all, he said:

I having seene the death of all my people thrice, and not one living of those three generations, but my self, . . . knowe the difference of peace and war. . . But now I am old, and ere long I must die, . . . I. . . knowe it is better to eat good meate, lie well, and sleep quietly with women and children, laugh and be merrie with you, . . . then [to] bee forced to flee from all, . . . and be hunted by you. . .¹⁰⁸

The Powhatans, unaccustomed to English aggression and conquest, still greatly outnumbered the English and could have banded together to fight, but didn't.

Governor Dale granted permission for the marriage. The English rotated leadership in the colony, so many supported the decision. The

¹⁰⁸ Fausz, 60-61.

marriage marked the beginning of a few years of peace. It is historically known as the Peace of Pocahontas.

Historian William Crashaw observed, in regards to Pocahontas' marriage: It is the " 'first' Christian ever of the [Powhatan] nation, the first Virginian ever spake English, or had a childe in marriage by an Englishman, Pocahontas was living proof that the idealistic projections of London could be realized."¹⁰⁹ To give credit to "idealistic projections of London" is a travesty, considering the expedient decimation of the Powhatans resulted from the English tendencies to conquer. The English plundered Powhatan's villages, slaughtered his people and his friends, betrayed his friendship, lied to him, and used his daughter against him.

Chief Powhatan's act of granting permission to the English for Pocahontas to wed Rolfe further evidenced qualities in the Powhatan culture that made Powhatans vulnerable to conquest. After all of the pain and suffering, Chief Powhatan diplomatically allowed his daughter to marry an Englishman. Powhatan allowed his daughter to marry in hopes that love would cover a multitude of sins, including years of hate. This last act of the Anglo-Powhatan War historically left the Powhatans and the English juxtaposed as conquered and conquering.

The terms of the Peace of Pocahontas inferred English dominance. In 1614, Chickahominy Indians and the Paspahegh Indians (Jamestown

colonists' main threats) made peace overtures and signed a treaty. The Chickahominies no longer lived under the rule of a single werowance, but instead under an eight-man council, who, according to treaty, voluntarily accepted James as King and Dale as deputy. Otherwise the Powhatan Indians kept their existing laws. Henceforth, the Chickahominies, once under Powhatan's rule, agreed to live as Englishmen. They also agreed not to kill or interfere with English persons or property. The English ordered them not to enter any English town without first declaring their English status. The Chickahominies also forcibly paid an annual tribute of two bushels of corn each. They had to provide "three of four hundred bowman to aide [the English] against the Spaniards. . . or against any other Indians which should, contrary to the established peace, offer us any injurie."¹¹⁰ In short, the Chickahominies had to pay a tax to a government they had no say in and they had to fight to defend a government that would not defend them. The very language of the treaty evidenced the English tendency to conquer. The fact that the Powhatans had little knowledge of what was therein written further evidenced that they were vulnerable to conquest.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 288.

¹¹⁰ Hamor, Ralph, *A True Discourse*, in *Jamestown Narratives, Eyewitness Accounts of the Virginia Colony, The First Decade: 1607-1617*. (Roundhouse: Champlain, Virginia, 1998). 800.

To further safeguard the peace, the English avoided close contact with the Powhatans. Historian J. Fausz voiced the English view of the conquered Powhatans:

With all their problems, the Powhatans were pitiful but not pitied. Debilitated, depopulated, and seemingly unthreatening, the Indians were viewed as defeated and downtrodden pawns rather than as proud and fierce warriors. . . the Virginia English regarded Indians as troubled obstacles to the fullest exploitation of land and resources, Englishmen considered them as scapegoats, blaming them for 'all the wrongs and injuries that the malice of the Divell or man cann afford.'¹¹¹

Though the Powhatans and the English did not fight in the few years following the Peace of Pocahontas, the English steadily expanded their territory, which meant pushing the Powhatans off hunting and foraging lands. Tensions increased after the death of Pocahontas in 1617. Chief Powhatan died in April 1618. Powhatan's two brothers succeeded him—Opecancanough, Smith's old friend, was one of them.

In 1617, the English suffered a "great mortality," or epidemic, which was "far greater among the Indians."¹¹² That same year, an epidemic devastated the deer population, a loss that was far more serious for the Powhatans than the English, considering they relied on deer as a main staple.

As tension increased from the epidemic, Governor Yeardley asked to

¹¹¹ Fausz, 316.

be released from office so that he could oversee tobacco profits. English corn production dwindled and fortifications fell into disrepair under poor leadership. Yeardley ignored instruction to increase trade with the Powhatans and instead reverted to policies of aggression in attempt to gain foodstuffs.¹¹³ The Peace of Pocahontas dissolved by 1618.

In November 1618, a band of Indians slew five Englishmen. Less than a week later, the same Indians murdered the three children of William Fairfax and two neighbor boys at the Fairfax home on Jamestown Island. The English wanted revenge, so Opecanough promised to bring the fugitives to justice, bowing to the whim of the English.

The first Virginia assembly met in 1619 and advised the colonists “neither utterly to rejecte them (the Powhatans), nor yet to drawe them too close (amongst the English habitations).”¹¹⁴ The English kept their distance from the Powhatans, as instructed, and enacted other laws to push the two groups even farther apart. Governor Yeardley declared that no one could teach an Indian to use a musket unless that Indian lived in an English village. These actions evidenced the English desire to maintain the upper hand, feeding their tendency to conquer.

¹¹² Argall, Samuel, *Letter to from Governor Argall to Virginia Company* (Virginia, 1618), Kingsbury, ed., 92.

¹¹³ Fausz, 315.

¹¹⁴ Pory, John, *Proceedings of the General Assembly of Virginia, July 30-August 4m 1619*, William Van Schreeven and George H. Reese, ed., (Jamestown, VA., 1969), 43.

With Pocahontas and Chief Powhatan dead, the peace that they instilled evaporated. Tensions only increased between the Powhatans and the English and old wounds festered. By 1620, the English claimed most of the waterfront properties along the James River to access their ships. The English claims of waterfront land interfered with the Powhatans' access to fields, reed-gathering areas, and the waterway itself. The English achieved great success planting tobacco on some of the most fertile grounds of Virginia, so land competition worsened by the day.

With competition for land and food increasing, Opecanough attempted to regain the survival advantage over the English. In the first half-decade of English colonization at Jamestown, the Powhatans held the advantage in survival skills and general power. It would have required little effort for the Powhatans to exterminate the English. Yet, after years of vacillating diplomacy and hostility, the English pushed the Powhatans further and further from their homes.

Opecanough, a fierce warrior, disagreed with his deceased brother about his lenient treatment of the English. When Chief Powhatan did not listen to Opecanough's objections, Opechancanough took matters into his own hands. In 1616, he tricked the English into wrongfully attacking the Chickahominy Indians. Opechancanough used the incident to draw the Chickahominies under direct Powhatan

protection and control and to incite a war with the English. With the same skillful planning, Opecanough carried out a massive surprise attack along the James River in 1622, in hopes to exterminate the English from Virginia, but it was too late for the conquering English to be conquered by the previously hospitable Powhatans. In March 1622, the Powhatans attacked plantations all over the James River, devastating the English population in a surprise raid. Over 350 English men, women, and children died in one day, nearly one-fourth of the Virginia English population at that time. Those who survived the attack gathered in eight defensible strongholds along the James River. Each stronghold remained under siege conditions with little food for a short amount of time. The English reinstated martial law. Hundreds more English died from starvation and disease within their defenses, or in sniper attacks when they attempted to plant fields. Plagues of smallpox and bubonic plague hit Virginia around that time as well.¹¹⁵

Despite the high death toll, the English chose to remain in the colony. The Powhatans' attempt to push the English out of Virginia came fifteen years too late. Helen Rountree described the aftermath of the event:

They (the English). . . remained more or less blind to the fact that their expanding settlements would impoverish Indian people, who

¹¹⁵ Hume, Ivor Noel, *Martin's Hundred* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc. 1982), 55.

wanted to continue living by a traditional economy that required large tracts of land for each family. They also remained unaware that in those Indian people's eyes the English were a symbol of insulting, if well-meaning, pressure for culture change, and for ruthless determination to occupy Indian living space. When the Powhatans did not make the effort in the 1620s, the English became angry; when the Powhatans used violence in 1622 to make the English leave, the English used violence to force the Powhatans to make room for them.¹¹⁶

The Englishmen's blindness to other cultures reveals the English belief in cultural superiority and is another factor in expedient decimation.

Following the 1622 attack, Henry Spelman and Raleigh Croshaw attempted to meet with the weroances of local tribes to determine the next strategic step. The Patawaomecks chose not to side with the Indians, and showed sympathy towards the English after a shipment of corn arrived. The Powhatan vacillation from diplomacy to hostility continued to manifest itself.

In May 1623, the English tricked 200 Pamunkey Indians and then served them poisoned wine. Not yet vindicated, in November of the same year, the Virginia militia expanded its range and made new enemies by attacking and burning Moyaone, the stockaded Potomac town of the Pascataway Indians.¹¹⁷

¹¹⁶ Rountree, Helen, *Pocahontas's People: The Powhatan Indians Through Four Centuries*, (University of Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma Press, 1996), 75.

¹¹⁷ Steele, Ian K, *Warpaths: Invasions of North America*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 43.

Harassments and battles continued as the English insulted Powhatan traditions. After 1624, documentation of Powhatan activity lessened as the English population grew. The English numbered twice the Powhatan population by the early 1640s.¹¹⁸ Powhatan decimation was in the works.

The Powhatans laid low for awhile after 1624, but the English still fortified their areas of settlement by routinely annoying Powhatan leadership.¹¹⁹ The English drafted a formal “peace” that the Powhatans agreed to in 1628. The treaty stated that no Indian people could visit English settlements or harm English livestock.¹²⁰ The English, predisposed towards aggression, had no intentions of abiding by the treaty for long, only until “ye English see a fit opportunity to break it.”¹²¹

Hostilities resumed in January of 1629; both sides violated the 1628 treaty many times. In 1630, the Virginia council offered Englishmen free land for settlement, an act that encouraged English aggression onto land the Powhatans valued.¹²²

¹¹⁸ Morgan, 404.

¹¹⁹ Rountree, *Pocahontas' People*, 79.

¹²⁰ McIlwaine, H.R., comp., *Minutes of the Council and General Court of Virginia, 1622-1632, 1670-1676*, 2nd ed, (Richmond: Virginia State Library, 1979), 198.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, 484.

¹²² Nugent, Neil Marion, comp. *Cavaliers and Pioneers: Abstracts of Virginia Land Patents and Grants, 1623-1800*, Vol. 1. (Richmond: Dietz Press, 1934), 44.

Finally, in 1632, the English and Powhatans agreed to another fragile truce.¹²³ The English tendency towards conquest evidenced itself further in the 1632 treaty, when the language portrayed the Powhatans and English as “irreconcilable enemies.”¹²⁴

In the 1630s-1640s, the English obsessively invested in their major cash crop: tobacco. The growth of tobacco quickly exhausted the land, limiting the Powhatans’ already cleared farmland to miniscule amounts. When food grew scarce, the English still acted aggressively towards the Powhatans, in efforts to obtain foodstuffs through intimidation. The limited amount of farmland made it nearly impossible for the Powhatans to maintain amicable relations with the English. When Anglo-Powhatan relations grew tense, the English acted violently, while the Powhatans, whose population dwindled to a point that meant certain death if they engaged the English, tried to swallow their pride and act diplomatically to keep the peace. An example of this occurred when Englishman John Burton killed a random Indian in retaliation for an Indian’s theft of some of Burton’s property. The English investigated and found Burton guilty for killing an innocent man, which put Anglo-Powhatan relations in jeopardy. The court at Jamestown demanded a fine from Burton for his behavior

¹²³ Steele, 47.

¹²⁴ Henning, William Waller, comp., *The Statutes at Large, Being a Collection of all the Laws of Virginia from the First Session of the Legislature*. Vol. 1. (New York: R&W&G. Bartow, 1809-1823), 167.

and ostracized him. The Powhatans, on the other hand, hastened to act compassionately toward the English, in hopes to avoid violence.

Opechancanough sent councilors from his tribe to let the English know he understood that the killing had been a mistake.¹²⁵ The English tendency towards aggression and the Powhatan tendency towards diplomacy acted again as cultural factors to expedite Powhatan decimation.

In April 1644, Powhatan policy shifted back to hostility, when Opechancanough staged a major attack and killed four hundred Englishmen.¹²⁶ The English retaliated by invading the chiefdoms of the Nansemonds, the Weyanocks, the Powhatans, and the Appamattucks. The English killed Powhatans and also sold them as servants or slaves.¹²⁷ By 1645, the English built forts near enemy towns as bases for further harassment.¹²⁸

By March 1646, the English noted the effect of English aggression on the Powhatan population. They claimed “the almost impossibility of a further revenge upon them [the Powhatans], they being dispersed and driven from their townes and habitations, lurking up and downe the woods in small number.”¹²⁹ The English wanted to establish an honorable

¹²⁵ McIlwaine, 478, 483.

¹²⁶ Frank, Joseph, ed., “News from Virginny”, 1644, *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography*, Issue 65, 85. 1957.

¹²⁷ Henning, 287-288.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, 289-293.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, 317-319, brackets mine.

peace as gentlemen with the Powhatans, so the English could resume expanding their tobacco crops and settlements.

The treaty of 1646 stated that the English had authority in the peninsula between the James and York Rivers, and any Indian trespassers would be killed at first sight. Furthermore, the Powhatans had to return English guns and prisoners. Powhatans kept as prisoners by the English, however, would not be returned, but kept as slaves. Also, Powhatans who found Indian slave runaways had to return those slaves to their English masters. The treaty stated that Indians could freely inhabit lands north of the York River, but only until the English found reason to expand there.¹³⁰

Both sides violated the treaty over the next half-century. Each time a violation occurred, disease, gunpowder, and Anglo-Powhatan cultural factors expedited the decimation of the Powhatan Indians. Helen Rountree noted:

There was never any real chance of holding the English back after 1646, even had their government wanted to do so. There were simply too many of them, and they all were too determined to make their fortunes raising tobacco. They flooded Indian lands at a rate and on a scale that, as Edmund Morgan put it, “transforms crime into politics.”¹³¹ After 1622 the English were little interested in missionizing Indians or anyone else. They were Protestants who

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, 323-326.

¹³¹ Morgan, 9.

maintained a distance from “savages”¹³² and they were determined to acquire the land they wanted. Their relations with the Powhatans were therefore primarily military and economic in nature for much of the seventeenth century.¹³³

The Powhatans held on to cultural traditions as best they could on their shrinking tribal lands. Isolated from other groups, Powhatans formed tribal cores that managed to survive to modern day. Nevertheless, by 1705, the English acknowledged the decimation of ninety-three percent of the Powhatan population.¹³⁴ The English nearly wiped the Powhatans off the earth in fewer than one hundred years.

¹³² Jennings, Francis. *The Invasion of America: Indians, Colonialism, and the Cant of Conquest*. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1954). 55-56.

¹³³ Rountree, *Pocahontas and Her People*, 89.

¹³⁴ Speck, 17.

Conclusion

Historians have written extensively on the early years of Anglo-Powhatan contact. The growth of the English culture in the New World has served as the main topic for hundreds of published books available for purchase in the general public. Though the culture of Virginia is vastly different than it was in the seventeenth century, interested persons have access to seventeenth-century English culture and therefore propagate it into posterity. Historians write about the documents and artifacts from that time period, so they use the English material culture as the vessel to propel knowledge of early English Virginia into the future. For example, the historical research base for seventeenth-century English culture in Jamestown has inspired not just books, but two major motion pictures in the last two decades: *Pocahontas* and *The New World*. Those two motion pictures are based on knowledge that comes almost entirely from English accounts and English archeological evidence. As the general public watches the movies (however historically accurate or not), knowledge of seventeenth-century English culture is obtained, spread to others, and thereby propelled onward.

The Powhatans did not use writing before the European invasion, nor during the early years of their decimation. Powhatan artifacts are

severely limited in the historical detail they can provide. The result of these two aspects of the Powhatan material culture is a restriction on how much of the Powhatan culture will propel into posterity. Resources available to the general public about Powhatan culture are far fewer in number compared to resources about English culture. In modern times, this means the public has a more credible grasp on the seventeenth-century English culture than the seventeenth century Powhatan culture. As time passes, this trend will continue, putting the Powhatan culture into position to fade away from public interest.

The lack of written and non-biodegradable material culture caused the assimilation of remaining Powhatan tribal cores with English lifestyles. By the time of Indian Removal (1830), the Powhatans had anglicized so much, they were no longer recognizable to outsiders as true Powhatans.¹³⁵ Since the Powhatans did not have a system of writing, the Powhatan culture could only be preserved through often spotty oral tradition. They could not learn to utilize artifacts because seventeenth century Powhatans composed their artifacts from natural products. Those biodegradable artifacts could not endure centuries of soil erosion for archeological study. For example, archeologists at Jamestown sift artifacts and easily identify English pottery, nails, and glass, but Powhatan artifacts of clay and bone

¹³⁵ Rountree, *Pocahontas and Her People* 187.

are nearly impossible to identify. The Powhatans could not revert to old systems of law because there was no documentation to support what that law ever was. The lack of material culture and written evidence limited any chance that the Powhatan culture could have rehabilitated to its pre-contact state in the centuries following decimation.

In modern day, ancestors of the aborigine Powhatans live on reservations in Virginia. The culture they propagate is a mixture of Anglicism and the small amount of historical detail that has survived the centuries as Powhatanism. As descendents from these reservations mix with other cultures and forget oral traditions, the Powhatan culture will fade from historical consciousness, thereby secure the English conquest that occurred long ago.¹³⁶

The way to prevent the delapidation or extinction of Powhatanism is with the propagation of public knowledge about the culture. Modern tribes share what oral traditions they can with anthropologists and other members of the public. However, oral traditions lose detail as each generation passes. With advancements in youth culture (movies and television programs about Powhatans), oral traditions in children are likely to lose even more historical detail due to the inundation of television and pop culture. The direct evidence available about Powhatans comes from

¹³⁶ Randolph and Turner, 232.

English written records (open to charges of bias) and archeological evidence. The acidic Virginia soil and frequent wet-dry cycles eats away even elaborate Powhatan objects to near-nonexistence. According to archeologist E. Randolph Turner III:

The Powhatans' ancestors were inadvertent experts in frustrating archeologists. They did not write; the structures they built were aboveground and left postholes as the only evidence of their existence; the rest of the people's technology was mostly biodegradable, in soils and in a climate in which organic materials decay rapidly; and their habitation sites were on good farmland that later got plowed, near waterways that sometimes eroded the shoreline away.¹³⁷

Since Powhatan archeological sites are not likely to produce much historical detail, government agencies and private organizations rarely front the costs and time of laboriously excavating. The general public's available resources on early Powhatan culture will not advance in any expedient fashion, thus preventing any rehabilitation of the pre-contact Powhatan culture.

The Powhatan population dwindled to 1,200 from 14,000 in the first hundred years of Anglo-Powhatan contact. The expediency of that decimation occurred as a result of common factors that occur in conquest environments: the onset of disease and the tragic overuse of weapons with the advantage of gunpowder. In the case of the Anglo-Powhatan

¹³⁷ Rountree and Turner, 3.

contact environment, traditions from both cultures expedited the decimation of the native Virginians. The English had centuries-old traditions of aggression in cultural contact environments that grew out of ideas of cultural superiority. The Powhatans constructed their contact policies nearly at the time of English arrival. The resulting Powhatan reaction vacillated from diplomatic to hostile. Though cultural traditions show that the Powhatans had the survival advantage in the early seventeenth century, instances of kindness and diplomacy made Powhatans vulnerable to English conquest.

Jamestown Island is today the site of a National Park. Little tangible evidence of the Powhatan decimation exists on the grounds of that National Park, but the irony that rings through the park is unmistakable. As adults and children arrive, they are taught through signage, pamphlets, and monuments that Jamestown is the “Birthplace of America.” A short walk from the parking lot takes visitors by the granite obelisk that states on one side “Jamestown, Birthplace of America” and on the other side the famous Virginia Company quote: “Lastly and chiefly, make yourselves all of one mind, for the good of your country, and your own, and to serve and fear God, the giver of all goodness, for every plantation that our Heavenly Father hath not planted shall be rooted

out.”¹³⁸ For those who know the story of the Powhatan decimation, something unsettling sets in with the opposing sides of that message...¹³⁹

The park’s website asserts Jamestown as the Birthplace of America as well. The website reads: “Over the centuries of Jamestown's existence, a series of celebrations honoring Jamestown as the birthplace of America have been held at this site.”¹⁴⁰ The island is named the Birthplace of America because it is the site of the first permanent English settlement in what is today the United States of America, a country where the dominant language is English and the dominant religion is Protestantism. In regards to Virginia, Sir Walter Raleigh said to Robert Cecil: “I shall yet live to see it an English nation.”¹⁴¹ Raleigh and other English leaders achieved what they set out to do. They took a land where the religion and language were exotic and spread the name of Protestant England. A century and a half after the founding of the Jamestown colony, the strict adherence to all that was English was tossed away for a new ethos—America. Since the English first settled permanently at Jamestown, it is considered the birthplace of that new ethos.

¹³⁸ Virginia Company of London, *Instructions Given By Way of Advice*.

¹³⁹ Personal photograph, “Jamestown Tricentennial Obelisk”, April 16, 2007.

¹⁴⁰ Kehrberg, Kirk, “Chronology of Jamestown Celebrations”, *NPS.gov: Historic Jamestown*, Updated April 1999, Available Online: <http://www.nps.gov/jame/historyculture/chronology-of-jamestown-commemorations.htm>.

¹⁴¹ Waldo, Arthur L., *True Heroes of Jamestown*, (Miami, Florida: American Institute of Polish Culture, 1977), 74.

Americans have boasted for centuries that the ethos of this country is founded on the idea that all humans have the freedom to live as they choose. *America* is freedom of speech and religion, respect for human rights, and the right to be different from the norm.

During the seventeenth century, the Powhatans embodied the values that make up the modern ethos of *America* to a greater degree than the English did. The Powhatans' tradition of kindness that helped the English survive despite cultural differences is a value that America has strived to embody for centuries. Ironically, these noble virtues, when paired with polar-opposite aggressive tendencies, merely expedited the decimation of the people that played a huge part in the birth of the ethos of *America*. Perhaps the Powhatans should have one of the four sides of the obelisk as well.

Shortly after the expedient decimation of the Powhatan Indians, the English colonists rallied together to form an independent country, founded on the ethos of *America*. Though the Powhatans virtually vanished, the noble virtues that expedited their decimation should be credited for standing the test of time. Jamestown is the Birthplace of America not only for its English roots, but also for its Powhatan roots. Though one culture wiped out another, the confluence of Anglo-Powhatanism eventually evolved into a peaceful AMERICA.

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